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THE RAJAH

BY PENNY

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THE RAJAH

BOOKS BY THE SAME AUTHOR

HISTORY OF FORT ST. GEORGE, MADRAS
ON THE COROMANDEL COAST
THE NAUTCH GIRL
THE FOREST OFFICER
A MIXED MARRIAGE
THE SANYASI
DILYS
CASTE AND CREED
THE TEA-PLANTER
THE INEVITABLE LAW
DARK CORNERS
THE UNLUCKY MARK
SACRIFICE

THE RAJAH

BY

F. E. PENNY

AUTHOR OF

"THE SANYASI," "CASTE AND CREED," ETC.

LONDON

CHATTO & WINDUS

1911

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THE RAJAH

CHAPTER I.

THE private polo-ground belonging to Dersingham Court, in Warwickshire, presented a brilliant scene. The small stand was filled with a gay company of interested spectators. A group of men stood by the entrance of the dressing-rooms below, commenting on the progress of the game as they smoked.

A girl, who had been scanning the players in the field with increasing anxiety, leaned over the balustrade of the stand and listened.

"It's extraordinary; I don't understand it!" said one.

"My dear fellow!" rejoined another. "It's simple enough. The Dersingham team is not playing up."

"Ted is doing all he knows."

"Any one can see that with half an eye. The mischief is he is not properly supported. Look at the Rajah! Ted relies on him, and what is he about? The man's asleep."

Delphine Dersingham shot a swift glance towards a figure in the field. The player was superbly mounted; but in spite of this fact he was strangely inactive. She stood up, and her deep violet eyes shone with a suspicion of moisture. It was very difficult to keep back the tear of indignant disappointment.

The inert polo-player glanced in her direction and

watched her movements. He saw her pass swiftly to the head of the stairway and disappear behind the building. A few seconds later he noted the white parasol she carried gleam among the shrubs near the house.

A shout ringing with excitement and not altogether free of anger greeted his ears. It came from Ted Dersingham.

"Play up, Rajah! Pull the game out of their hands. Great Scott! man! Don't let them lick us!"

The ponies' hoofs rattled; the polo-sticks whirled more fiercely than ever. Where the fight was thickest, there was the Rajah of Shivapore, one of the best players India had ever produced.

Delphine never slackened her pace till she reached the raised terrace that extended along the western face of the old Court.

Close under the walls of the ancient timbered gables were borders of old-time flowers. Their sweetness floated in at the open windows mingled with the scent of the lime trees sheltering the house from the north-west winds. The terrace itself was of gravel, bordered by a stone balustrade. Immediately below was a path; and beyond the path stretched lawns and flower beds where roses grew in profusion. Still further off lay the well-wooded park; and almost out of sight a tall fence—over which the wild roses and honeysuckle sprawled—divided the grass land from the road.

Delphine mounted the steps of the terrace and approached her mother. Mrs. Dersingham's face brightened as she caught sight of her daughter.

"You are back early. Is the game over?"

Delphine did not reply directly to the question. She dropped into one of the chairs near, shut up her parasol with a vicious snap, and flung it on the ground.

"Oh, mother!" she began, and then stopped lest she should lose control of her voice. "The last game—the very

last game that Ted will play at Dersingham for goodness knows how long!"

Mrs. Dersingham's quick ear detected that all was not well. She waited, and then asked whether matters were going very badly for her son.

"Shockingly badly," was the reply. "It is too sickening that the game should be lost in this way!"

The elder woman took up some neglected knitting and busied herself over the pins, not because there was any haste in the completion of the work, but because it helped to divert her attention from the sight of her daughter's distress.

"Lost!" she repeated. "Then it is over. How vexed Ted will be!"

"It is as good as lost. They have scored two goals to our one; and from all appearances when I left the stand, it seemed likely that they would double that number."

"Is the Warwick team stronger than usual?"

"No; that's the irritating part of it. One of their best men was unable to play; and they had to get a substitute who has had very little practice with them. The fault is entirely with the Dersingham team."

"What was the matter?"

"The men seemed out of heart—asleep. Oh! I don't know what was the matter with them! Anyway, they were not playing up."

"So you came away," remarked Mrs. Dersingham, glancing up from her knitting with a sympathy she did not think it wise to express. She knew how close the tears were.

Delphine picked up the discarded parasol and used it upon the gravel, rolled to the smoothness of a billiard-table by careful gardeners.

"It may be virtuous to know when you are beaten; but it is intolerable to look on and see the process."

Mrs. Dersingham put down her knitting and glanced in the direction of the house.

"If the game is drawing to a close you had better hurry Carter with the tea. He is so upset at the month's notice I have been obliged to give him, that he seems to have lost his head."

"It is rather hard after ten years' faithful service," she said as she rose to do her mother's bidding.

She entered the house by a garden door and returned almost immediately followed by the solemn butler, behind whom came two footmen and two neat maids, all suffering under the same misfortune, a month's notice, and all proportionately depressed. Directed by Delphine the chairs and little tea-tables were rearranged and laid according to Mrs. Dersingham's fancy. When all was satisfactorily completed and the servants dismissed, Delphine once more seated herself.

"What was Ted doing when you left the stand?" asked her mother.

"Judging from his expression, he was saying many things that he did not learn in the nursery."

"Poor old Ted!" responded Mrs. Dersingham. "And the Rajah, from whom he expected so much, I hope he was playing his best."

Delphine made an impatient little movement that her mother knew of old, as she replied with some heat.

"Indeed! he was doing nothing of the sort! He failed us altogether. We counted him as Ted's best man. You know how he can play if he chooses. To-day he seemed in a dream—as if he had forgotten where he was, forgotten why he was there, even forgotten how to play. I could have howled at him for being such a dummy; such an out and out rabbit!"

Her school-girl slang, one of the traits of her earlier self, that peeped out now and then when she was carried away

by excitement, drew a smile from her mother. It recalled the out-spoken short-petticoated girl, bubbling over with fun and good spirits and free from trouble. The girl was still there though skirts had been lengthened and hair turned up in the latest approved style by the hands of a skilled lady's-maid. The eyes that flashed with indignation or melted with laughter were unchanged; but a new shadow of care clouded the brow. It was not altogether due to the shortcomings of the Rajah.

"Don't call him names, Delphie," said Mrs. Dersingham, in mild remonstrance. "There are excuses for him. No doubt he had forgotten, as you say, the important issues that hung in the balance."

"Why should he forget? He has not had a month's notice like poor Carter and the rest." She turned to the table near by and lifted one of the spoons from the saucer. "Just look what Carter has done—allowed one of the kitchen teaspoons to find its way here!"

She placed the spoon where the butler could not fail to observe it when he brought the tea. Her mother continued.

"I am sure the Rajah is feeling sad at the thought that his happy life in England is coming to an end. You mustn't be hard upon him."

"Why should he feel sad?" responded the girl, impatiently. "He is going back to India to wealth and state, and—er"— she paused at a loss to describe something that she had never seen—"to the rich oriental life of luxury that is the lucky lot of the Indian prince."

There was a suspicion of a smile upon Mrs. Dersingham's lips as she listened to this somewhat florid description. She hid her amusement however, and replied seriously.

"From what I remember of India, the lot of an Indian prince is not exactly lucky. Luxurious it may be and wealthy——"

"With our poverty before my eyes wealth seems the best of all luck," said Delphine.

"It depends entirely upon the conditions attached to it whether luxury and riches may be reckoned lucky and desirable. I should say that the conditions that must inevitably accompany the Rajah's wealth will often weigh heavily upon him. In his English public school and university life he probably outgrew the desire for a good many of his oriental luxuries."

Delphine was once again poking the faultless gravel with the ferrule of her parasol. She weighed her mother's words with all the gravity of youth.

"Does a man ever outgrow the desire, I wonder," she said. "It seems to me that his appreciation of luxuries increases with his power of indulging in them. What I mean to say about the Rajah is that being a prince, and possessing a princely revenue, he can gratify his tastes without thinking twice about it. Not all the thinking in the world will enable Ted to gratify his tastes."

"A prince has something more to do than gratifying his tastes. There are his duties to the State——"

Mrs. Dersingham stopped. Once more a wave of irritation passed over Delphine, inciting her to restless movement. She rose from her seat, passed a foot remorsefully over the pitted gravel, and partially obliterated the devastation she had wrought.

"I know this," she announced severely: "it was his duty to play up and win the game. He is a superb polo-player; and if he had chosen he might have brought Ted's team success. Surely he could have given us this last gratification!"

The words choked her. She looked towards the fine old gables of the Court with their blackened timbers and mullioned windows. A light breeze ruffled the soft green foliage of the limes and brought a whiff of scent from the

yellow roses that hung above the diamond paned casements. Across the park the cuckoo called and the wryneck replied with its discordant laugh. The grass in the park was gilded with buttercups, and the May blossom dying under the ardent rays of the summer sun sent down snowy showers with each breath of wind.

"Dear old house! dear old home!" cried the girl. "It is very hard to part with it all."

The older woman found a difficulty in refraining from echoing the sad cry, never far from her own lips. She controlled herself, however, and said in placid tones that deceived her daughter into belief in her resignation—

"Shall we make an effort to stay on at the Court? Let me see! I could put down the horses and carriage. Carter must go, and the footmen and lady's maid as well. The garden could be cut down, and four out of the five men dismissed."

Delphine broke in upon her scheme of retrenchment with an impetuous negative.

"No, mother, no! We will not label ourselves reduced and impoverished by the land tax and death dues. The place must go."

"And my poor people with it, I suppose," said Mrs. Dersingham, with a sigh. "There are the coal and blanket clubs, the Christmas treats and summer outings."

"They must all go with the rest. These are not the days for sentiment. The poor will be pensioned and insured. They will not require coal and blanket clubs and such-like obsolete charities. We have been into the matter carefully with Ted, who has done his best for us; and we have decided that we cannot continue living here with any self-respect."

There was silence. Mrs. Dersingham did not venture a remark. She had nothing better to propose. Hours had been passed in searching for a loop-hole whereby the fate that threatened them might be averted. The Court must be

given up till her resources had been husbanded. The same thought crossed the mind of Delphine.

"There is no going back on our arrangements. The house is let to the Moses Levi tribe and that settles it."

"It certainly would be difficult to alter our plans," Mrs. Dersingham admitted reluctantly.

"You must go to Annie and her husband, and I will go with Ted to India. At the end of three years we may hope to gather here again. The place can't run away."

Neither spoke for a short time. The girl's eye swept the landscape with the lingering regard of affection for a home that she had known from her birth. The mother's look wandered no further than her daughter. The prospect of leaving the house she had occupied since her marriage was easier to face than the loss of her two children. Had she done right in giving her consent? She could not expect to keep Delphine by her side when she became homeless and dependent in a measure on another for fitting shelter. She would be able to pay her own way liberally; but the house of her married daughter would not be her own. It was best that Delphine should accept her brother's offer and go out with him to India.

"I am very grateful to the Rajah for having given Ted the appointment of private secretary," she remarked, coming out of her reverie.

"The Rajah ought to be very grateful to Ted for accepting the post," rejoined Delphine. "He will find him of great assistance in introducing improvements into the State. Ted says that it has the reputation of being the most conservative place in India."

"Then the Rajah's task will not be easy."

At this juncture Carter approached to announce the arrival of two callers; and Delphine, with a sudden smile of pleasure, hastened to greet them.

CHAPTER II.

"Carrie! and Royama! How nice of you to come!" cried Delphine, in the breezy, impulsive manner that never erred on the side of coldness.

"You here, Delphine!" said Carrie. "I thought you were at the polo-match."

"It was going so badly I couldn't stand it any longer," she replied with a characteristic shake of her shoulders, indicating to those who knew her that there was a grievance in the air.

Carrie Clarke looked at Mrs. Dersingham for an explanation.

"Ted's side is losing," she observed quietly.

"Oh, I am so sorry!" said Royama Gopaula.

The words, spoken with a foreign accent by the Hindu girl, rang with sincerity. She was a great admirer of the sporting Englishman who captained the team.

"What a bother! and the last game on the ground, too! How slack of Ted to let himself be beaten," was Carrie's outspoken, off-hand comment.

She was the daughter of the vicar of Dersingham and loyal to the last degree to the Court. She knew the family sufficiently intimately to criticize with the candour of an old friend.

"It wasn't Ted's fault," responded Delphine, with a touch of indignation.

"Whose was it if it wasn't his?" asked Carrie.

"It was all the Rajah Narayan's."

At the sound of the Rajah's name Royama, who was speaking to Mrs. Dersingham, looked round and asked—

"What has the Rajah done, Delphine?"

"Lost us the game by his careless playing. I could have shot him!" she concluded with an assumption of blood thirstiness that brought a smile on Carrie's lips.

"Let me see," said the vicar's daughter, knitting her brows as though she were considering an important and puzzling point. "The Rajah is a Hindu. Will he be buried or burned when he dies? I know it is one or the other. We had better find out before you carry your threat into execution."

Delphine caught the twinkle in her eye and her indignation disappeared in the imperturbable good humour of her friend.

"In my present mood, if I had my way, he should be both buried and burned; but don't talk about him. Let's forget his very existence. Why were you not at the match, the very last match on the Dersingham ground?"

"It may not be the last," objected Carrie, cheerfully. "Your new tenants will play perhaps."

"They are in Smyrna figs and Egyptian cigarettes; and they are not likely to prove enthusiastic over polo like Ted and the Rajah. I am sorry—no! I am glad you were not there to see our defeat."

"I could not possibly come; I had to go to town with Royama to do some shopping," explained Carrie.

"We have been buying some of my outfit for the voyage," added Royama. "Think of my joy, Delphine! I am going home—home to my father's house in dear old Shivapet, dear sleepy old Shivapet!"

"Ah! we mean to wake up the ancient city," announced

Delphine. "The Rajah and Ted are already planning schemes to improve and modernize the place. It is to be go-a-head Shivapet when the Rajah rules."

Royama watched her with a puzzled expression, not certain if she spoke in jest or in earnest.

"My father used to say that old trees cannot be made to produce young bark," she remarked, with a quaint solemnity that made them all laugh.

"We say that you cannot teach old dogs new tricks," observed Carrie.

"The city of Shivapet is not like an old dog; it is like a noble elephant and its palace is its richly ornamented howdah!"

Royama was the daughter of one of the nobles of Shivapore, Gopaula by name. Her father having received a liberal education himself, desired to give his daughter the same advantage. With that object he sent her to England. For the last three years she had made her home at the vicarage. In addition to her ordinary studies she learned many things from her constant companion, Carrie, that were not to be found in the printed books on the schoolroom shelf. One was how to use her liberty; for in her own country well-born women were hidden behind the purdah. It required some patience on the part of Mrs. Clarke to teach the timid Indian girl that she could travel in a crowded train without nervous giggling; and walk down a busy street without exhibiting a superabundance of self-consciousness.

She wore neither hat nor cap. Her silk saree was drawn like a shawl over her abundant hair. The dress beneath the saree was made by a good English dressmaker. The artist had contrived to impart the fashion of the day to the simply cut garment without in any way detracting from the oriental tone of the saree. The effect with the regular features and olive complexion of the wearer was striking,

and Royama often suffered from the unconscious stare of artistic eyes.

Their conversation was interrupted by the arrival of another guest, heralded by the solemn butler who gravely announced Mr. Harlesden.

Walter Harlesden was in the Indian Civil Service; a man still on the right side of forty, clean shaven and of a tall spare figure. He advanced quickly, a keen hazel brown eye sweeping over the little company assembled. In appearance he suggested straightforwardness and a natural aversion to anything in the shape of subterfuge. Yet with his love of the truth, Harlesden was not devoid of the gift of diplomacy and grace of manner so necessary to the politician.

It was for this reason perhaps that he had been appointed Resident in the State of Shivapore. The presence of a strong man with judgment and moderation had been needed in the interval that occurred between the death of the old Rajah and the assumption of power by the heir, Narayan. The interregnum took place while the young Rajah was in England completing his education. During the interval the Dewan, with Harlesden at hand to advise, ruled the State, adhering to the policy of the dead man without making any changes.

Harlesden had run home on short leave and made his headquarters whilst in England at his father's house in Leamington. He was an old friend of the Dersinghams and gladly renewed his friendship. To-day he had driven over partly for pleasure and partly to see Ted, whom he had not met since the appointment of private secretary to the Rajah had been confirmed.

Hearing of the match he concluded that Delphine would be on the polo-ground as long as the game was proceeding, and it was a pleasant surprise to find her with her mother. She came forward impulsively with the warm welcome

accorded to all friends alike, a hearty greeting on her lips and an unconscious light in her eyes. Her manner might easily have persuaded the most modest of men that he was the one person in the world she most wished at that moment to see. It did not enter her head that her spontaneous warmth might set a man's pulses beating faster than usual; nor did she dream that the answering light in his eyes could mean anything more than a responsive pleasure in the meeting of an old friend.

Having shaken hands he walked up to Mrs. Dersingham and took a chair by her side. Delphine, Royama and Carrie seated themselves near and joined in the conversation.

"So you have really decided to leave the Court?" he said, addressing Mrs. Dersingham.

"For a while; I am afraid it is inevitable. It will be wiser for me to go to my elder daughter, Lady Angus, while Delphine is in India."

"How soon is Miss Dersingham sailing?"

"Early in the autumn. Miss Gopaula has decided to take a berth in the same ship."

His eyes were upon Delphine who was talking to Carrie, and he did not make any comment on the news.

"I was hoping that I should see you," continued Mrs. Dersingham, recalling his wandering thoughts. "I was anxious to thank you for getting my son this appointment as secretary to the Rajah. The Rajah was quite willing, quite pleased I might say, to give it to him; they have been chums ever since their Eton days. I was afraid the powers that be might have refused to sanction it as Ted is not in any of the services. I feel sure it was due to your kindly office."

"Believe me, I was glad to do both the Rajah and Ted a good turn. I honestly think," continued Harlesden, with his exactitude, "that Ted is admirably suited to fill the

post. It wants a man who is not an office clerk nor a slave of routine. His duties will be many and various."

"None unpleasant, I hope."

Harlesden smiled as the maternal solicitude peeped out.

"Oh, no; not unpleasant, whatever else they may be." He turned to Delphine. "How do you like the prospect of going out to India?"

"Immensely," she replied with enthusiasm. "Do tell me something about the place. Is it full of tigers and snakes?"

"Tigers and snakes!" repeated Harlesden, with amusement. "You might come across them in the jungles of Shivapore; but they don't grow in the back-gardens of Shivapet. You need have no fear that they will be sitting on your doorstep waiting to give you a welcome."

"My doorstep! That sounds homely; it implies a house."

"To be sure. There's a very comfortable bungalow, which is being prepared by order of the Rajah for his secretary."

"How nice!" said Delphine, delightedly. "Where is it?"

"It stands in a corner of the palace grounds."

"What kind of climate has Shivapore?" asked Mrs. Dersingham.

"It is lovely," put in Royama, unable to refrain from praising her much-loved home. "It is like your softest, balmiest summer."

"Never very hot, and never very cold," added Harlesden.

At this point Carter approached, bearing a tray on which was a coffee-pot, a cannister, and a spirit kettle.

"The water is boiling, miss," he said, as he set the tray upon one of the tea-tables.

Delphine busied herself with the coffee, measuring out the quantity with care.

"What are you doing, Miss Dersingham?" asked Harlesden, watching her.

"Making coffee for the Rajah. He likes it prepared in a particular way; and I usually do it myself. Now, Carter, the hot water. You are sure that it is boiling?"

"Quite, miss."

The butler handed her the kettle, and she poured the water out with the same care she had observed in measuring the coffee.

"The Rajah ought to feel flattered at your taking so much trouble for him," remarked Harlesden, as he watched the process.

"No doubt he does," replied Delphine, indifferently.

"How soon are you returning to India, Mr. Harlesden?" asked Carrie.

"I must be back at Shivapet in time for the induction ceremonies, when the Rajah will take his seat on the throne."

The preparation of the coffee was accomplished; and Carter, with stately tread, carried the tray back to the pantry, where the precious liquid was to be kept warm until it was required. Delphine turned to Harlesden.

"The Rajah will make a splendid ruler. He is so clever at everything—a good shot, a pretty cricketer, a magnificent polo-player——"

"When he chooses," interjected Carrie, with brutal truth.

Delphine ended her panegyric abruptly, and the warm approval glowing in her eyes faded. Harlesden noted the swift changes that crossed her face, and he wondered how deep the emotion went. He remembered her as the schoolgirl, and he thought he knew how much importance to attach to her rhapsodies. Then the question entered his mind whether the Rajah would exercise the same

discernment if he chanced to hear similar words falling from her lips.

Suddenly there came upon the rose-scented air the sound of distant cheering. For one moment the young head was uplifted and the eager eyes bent in the direction of the polo-ground beyond the belt of shrubbery. Then, with an exclamation of impatience and anger, she stamped her foot on the gravel and pressed her hands against her ears.

"Oh, dash it all!"

"Delphie, dear! Do remember that you are no longer a schoolgirl!" remonstrated her mother.

Harlesden laughed. For some reasons he was rejoiced that there were no radical changes in the girl he had known when he was last at home. On the other hand, he was asking himself whether, after all, Mrs. Dersingham had done right in giving her consent to Ted's proposal that his sister should keep house for him at Shivapet. Delphine, still restless with indignation, continued to inveigh against the bad luck of the Dersingham team. Carrie, followed by Royama, ran down the terrace steps with the intention of meeting the players and pouring out her congratulations and condolences where they were respectively due. Even Mrs. Dersingham, after her mild reproof of her daughter, experienced the restlessness that had come over the party; she rose from her chair and walked to the balustrade. The polo-ground was not visible, but she could see the broad path that led from it by way of the shrubbery, to the house.

"If the Rajah had only played as he can play this would not have happened," cried Delphine, addressing no one in particular. Harlesden, however, took the words as spoken to him, and replied by a question.

"What wouldn't have happened?"

"This defeat."

The cheering recommenced, louder than before. It was

evident that the players, victorious and defeated, and the spectators, were on their way from the field.

"Oh, I hate him! I hate him! I'll tell him to his face that he is detestable!"

"Who?" asked Harlesden. He knew nothing of the fortunes of the game.

"The Rajah Narayan. He might have saved the game if he had exerted himself!"

The appearance of Ted, followed by Carrie, Royama, and some of the guests, stopped further explanation as well as further abuse of the absent offender.

Edward Dersingham, known to all his friends and acquaintances as Ted, was a man of big build. He had brown hair, and a fair, sunburned complexion. His eyes were bluer than those of his sister, and they looked out upon the world with the steady confidence of the guileless. He greeted his mother as he mounted the steps.

"Hallo, mater! We've won after all!" He did not stay to receive her congratulations, but passed on to his sister. "Delphie! Good news! We've won by a couple of goals!"

"Won? Impossible!"

"Yes; you ought to have stopped to see the finish. It was splendid! Such a triumph!"

Delphine gazed at him incredulously. "How could you possibly manage to pull the game together? When I left the ground it was at death's door, and past praying for. I couldn't bear to see you defeated, so I bolted."

"And so lost the moment of your life," said Ted with fraternal callousness to a sister's feelings.

"How on earth did it happen?" she asked in glad surprise, as she realized the truth of his tale.

"It was all the Rajah's doing. He seemed to wake up suddenly to the critical condition of things, and to remember what was expected of him. It was simply glorious to see

him pull us out of our difficulties. The Warwicks couldn't stand against him. When once he got hold of the ball he romped in with it just as he pleased. Two goals in ten minutes wasn't bad, was it?"

A little crowd of listeners had gathered round the speaker. They had seen it all, but were more than willing to "fight the battle o'er again." Carrie and Royama, who had not been present, were eager for every detail.

"Bravo! Well done, Rajah!" cried the vicar's daughter.

Royama looked as though she would have liked to have echoed those sentiments; but the inherent modesty of the Indian girl of good birth kept her silent. Ted continued, unwilling that any portion of the tale should be lost.

"That wasn't sufficient for Narayan. He meant to go one better. With fresh ponies we went at it again; and, would you believe it! he pulled off another two goals in magnificent form."

Delphine listened with shining eyes and parted lips. "Good! Good!" she cried. "Where is the Rajah? I must thank him. Oh, I love him for it!"

Her jubilant words rang out clearly above the murmurs of the listening company, and reached the ears of Harlesden. They also fell with equal distinctness upon the ears of the Rajah, as he stepped unnoticed across the terrace towards the excited group. As soon as the company recognized his presence, a way was opened for the hero of the hour. With hand extended and eyes for no one else, he walked straight up to Delphine.

CHAPTER III.

The Rajah Narayan Chakravarti Krishna Swamy, whom it is sufficient to know by his first name, was the son of one of the smaller feudatory princes of India. His State lay for the most part on a fertile plain. It produced grain, sugar, silk, and other commodities that found a steady market in the export as well as in the inland trade. During the last quarter of a century a barren district that had yielded least to agricultural effort proved to be rich in mineral deposits. The royalties accruing through the exploitation of this part of the State bade fair to double the revenues of Shivapore.

In view of this increasing revenue, the old Rajah had been prevailed upon by the British Government to send his only son and heir to England to be educated. It was hoped by this means many modern improvements, that did not commend themselves to the conservative old Rajah, might be introduced after his death by his more liberal-minded son.

Care had been observed in placing the boy where he would not forget the dignity due to his position, and where the pernicious influence of the zenana life would be obliterated. Adulation, insincere flattery, and the fostering of undesirable tastes are the curse of the inner life of eastern palaces. They sap the very foundation of healthy manhood, and, from the European point of view, destroy both body and soul. From this calamity Narayan had been

delivered in time. His generous nature and natural nobility, aided by judicious training, had answered all expectation. Without being remarkably clever or learned, he developed into as genial and pleasant a man as any European could desire to meet.

Narayan came to England when he was thirteen years of age, and a year later was sent to Eton. He remained at school till he was seventeen. A couple of years on the Continent with a tutor prepared him for the University. At Oxford for the first time in his life, he was given his liberty as far as the rules of the University allowed. To his credit, and that of the people who had been entrusted with his education, he did not abuse that liberty.

At Eton he made a chum of Ted Dersingham. The friendship was broken when the Rajah went abroad; but it was renewed at Oxford, where they found themselves, quite by chance, entered at the same college, both having gone up rather later than was customary. The result of this friendship was that the Rajah frequently visited at the Court, where he was thrown into the society of his host's sister.

Ted's father died somewhat suddenly, and the son came into the property. There was a heavy charge upon it in the shape of provision for his mother and sisters. The death dues were large. On the top of this severe drain upon the resources of the estate came the increased land tax. The rents paid by the tenants could not be raised. There was, indeed, more likelihood of a necessity to reduce them, for times were bad. It was better that economy should be practised at the beginning of his career than at the end. Ted wisely resolved, with his mother's consent, to nurse the estate for a few years. By this means justice would be done to the tenants, and the buildings throughout could be kept in proper repair. The property instead of deteriorating through starvation, might be developed and

improved. Moreover, his mother would have no scruple in accepting the payment of her jointure; and the two daughters, Lady Angus and Delphine, could receive their portions without putting the estate in actual financial difficulties. Arrangements had been made to let the Court; and it was considered a piece of good luck when the Rajah, seeing Ted at a loss to know what to do with himself, suggested that he should act as his private secretary.

The appointment was not accepted without some misgivings on the part of the Englishman. Beyond the experience he had had in helping his father to manage the estate, Ted had received no training to fit him for a private secretaryship, and he had a very vague idea of the duties that would be required of him. He endeavoured to point this out to the Rajah as they sat in the smoking-room after dinner.

"I know nothing of accounts beyond what I have had to deal with in my own banking book with its credit and expenditure," said Ted.

"I am not looking for a clerk as a private secretary," replied the Rajah. 'I can easily find a native accountant quite capable of keeping the books of the palace expenditure."

"And I can't write a very clear hand. They didn't teach us that sort of thing at Eton," continued Ted, enumerating his short-comings with the honesty of the Briton who hates to be burdened with a false character.

"The type-writer solves that difficulty, with another native clerk to manipulate it."

"Then where do I come in?" asked Ted, troubled with a faint shadow of a suspicion that the Rajah, in the generosity of his heart, was creating a soft billet for him.

"I shall want you, or a man like you, to help me to live the life I have learned to appreciate in England. The

last nine years have been spent in cultivating tastes and establishing habits that must be indulged, if I am not to die of inanition. I want horses and dogs, motor cars, a billiard table. I want sport, hunting, racing, and big-game shooting. In all these things I must have the help of a man like yourself, who has been accustomed to them; otherwise I shall not be able to keep them going to my mind. If I attend to State business all the morning, as will probably be the case, I can't walk round the stables, as we do here, for instance, directly after breakfast. I should much prefer the stables to the State; but I am afraid they can't be exchanged. It is absolutely necessary that the master's eye should supervise. As the master's eye will be occupied with other and more important matters, there must be an adequate proxy. If you don't object to the work, and will try to imagine that you are doing it all for yourself here, at the Court, it will suit me exactly."

Ted listened, removing the cigarette from his lips occasionally to utter the inarticulate sounds indicating that the listener heard and understood.

"It all seems as easy as winking. I wonder if I am worth my salary?"

"Wait till you have made the acquaintance of my gentle, soft-tongued subjects! Wait till I send you as my proxy to interview the Ranees!" said the Rajah with a laugh.

"I thought strange men were not allowed inside the zenana," observed Ted.

"Nor are they; but that does not save them from being worried outside the zenana purdah with the Ranees behind."

Again the Rajah laughed at the vision conjured up before his eyes.

"What can they want with the outside world?" asked Ted.

"They want information about the why and the wherefore of every trivial incident that occurs. If my father was a little late in going out for his drive they used to send to inquire if he was indisposed. As soon as he came in they asked where he had been, and why he had returned three minutes sooner than usual. Dr. Constable will tell you what he thinks of them; and whether he considers his appointment as palace surgeon a sinecure. I don't think a day elapses without one or other of the Ranees sending for him."

"How can he prescribe if he can't see them?" asked Ted, whose mind was a blank page regarding things Indian.

"Don't laugh, there's a good fellow. It sounds like burlesque; but, upon my honour, it's true! There is a little opening in the curtain, and he is allowed to put his hand through and feel their pulses. If he wants to look at a tongue, the tongue is presented for his inspection at the same opening."

They laughed together without offence as young men, who know each other well, laugh in the privacy of the smoking-room.

"There are lots of funny tales about Dr. Constable's adventures in the palace," continued the Rajah. "Mrs. Constable has a keen sense of humour, and she is continually giving him away."

"How do you find all this out?"

"The Constables run home to England every three years, and they always make a point of coming to see me. Then I hear these tales. They were over last summer, and Mrs. Constable had several new stories. You will gather a little store of stories in which you will figure yourself during your residence in Shivapet; but as you have no wife to let the cat out of the bag, possibly we shall never hear them."

"Oh, you shall hear them all right," rejoined Ted.

His thoughts were still upon the serious side of the question. He was not yet satisfied that he could honestly earn his salary.

"If you think that I am really worth the thousand a-year you have offered me," he began, flicking the ash off his cigarette.

"Worth it? You are worth double that, for a reason I have not yet mentioned," cried the Rajah, with sudden warmth. "Do you realize that you will be the only decent man of my age and tastes that I shall be able to speak to as a friend when I get back to Shivapet? The Doctor, an excellent fellow in his way, is no sportsman, and he's fifty if he's a day—a suitable age to attend on the zenana folk, but no companion for me. Mr. Harlesden I have only met once or twice, and each time he has had a good deal to say about my duty to the State. Wythall, of the police, may or may not be pleasant. I don't know anything about him. So, if you do nothing else but lend me a willing ear when I want to let loose, you may rest satisfied that you have earned your salary."

Ted smiled as he remarked with a touch of affection.

"All right, old chap. My post will be an easy one. You are not very formidable when you let yourself go."

"Wait till you hear the tiger roaring in its own jungle," responded the other.

He spoke in jest; but underneath there was a current of earnestness that escaped the ear of his listener.

* * * * * *

With Delphine's outspoken words ringing in his ears, the Rajah clasped the hands extended towards him.

"You won the game!" cried Delphine. "You saved the good name of the Dersingham team, Rajah! I shall never forget it. I was in the depths of despair when I ran away from what I thought was going to be a miserable

defeat. You have turned it into a triumph, and have made me happier than I can tell you!"

His dark eyes met her steady gaze, and he noted the light that danced in the violet depths. As he listened he was conscious of a strange conflict of emotion. Her speech stirred him deeply. "I love him for it!" "I am more happy than I can tell you!" What might not those words mean spoken by a woman to a man? And the eyes that were lifted to his seemed to endorse them.

Yet there was something else besides words and looks to be reckoned with. The tone in which the sentiments were expressed was the tone that might have been used by Ted. Over and over again had the Rajah felt this barrier to any other emotion but one of *bonne camaraderie* rise when he had been in the company of English girls. It occurred constantly, guarding intimacy from difficulties that might endanger friendship. He had frequently begun to talk to English women with the consciousness ever present in the mind of the Oriental, that he, a man, was in the company of a woman. He ended by forgetting this vital fact, and remembering only that he had been enjoying the society of congenial companions, with whom he had been laughing and talking as he might have laughed and talked with men.

This past experience was his salvation in the fierce light of Delphine's extravagant praise. Though more than a little moved, he kept his head. She was grateful, intensely grateful; that was all. Yet his voice was not quite as steady as usual, as he replied quietly.

"I did nothing more than your brother might have done, Miss Dersingham, had the luck been with him."

"You did a great deal more than Ted at his best could have done. He is a good player, I admit; but he can't play like you."

"Since you are pleased," he said, not wishing to depreciate an accomplishment he was aware he possessed,

"I am overjoyed at finding myself the author of your pleasure."

She looked at him with a question in her eyes as well as on her lips.

"Why didn't you make the effort while I was there?"

"My thoughts were wandering to the fact that this might be my last game—perhaps my last visit to Dersingham."

"I concluded that you were asleep."

"I woke up when I saw you leave the stand. I guessed you were angry, and that I had fallen in your estimation. I was right, wasn't I?"

"I was furious, Rajah, raging at your—your——"

"I know; my stupidity. It stirred me to action. Have I won back your favour?"

"You have, indeed! You are forgiven. It is a splendid victory, a grand finish to our Dersingham polo. Thank you, Rajah, thank you!"

Again there was a superabundance of expression that might have been misleading where there was an excess of vanity.

Ted, surrounded by friends, among whom Carrie was prominent, continued to give details of the fight. The Warwicks, knowing that they were the weaker team of the two, joined in good-humouredly.

Harlesden remained silent. He had heard Delphine's speech, and he had seen how the Rajah received it. There was nothing in the attitude of the latter to which he could take exception; yet inwardly he nursed a vague feeling of resentment. It would have been hard to say against whom it was directed. Somehow things were not quite as they should be. It was not the kind of speech that should in his opinion be addressed to a native of India were he prince or baboo. And Delphine ought not to have made it.

The Political Agent was no prig, though he ran a danger sometimes of being mistaken for one. The man was intensely in earnest. He had entered the Indian Civil Service originally with no other special object than of making it a profession by which he might earn a satisfactory livelihood; but as he came to understand the work that was required of him, his interest awoke, and it is not saying too much to assert that he lived for India. It permeated his whole life and filled his existence to the exclusion of all other pursuits except big-game shooting. On rare occasions he permitted himself a holiday in the jungles of Shivapore, tracking the cattle-destroying tiger and leopard, and sitting up over a kill.

He was an advanced politician, inclined to believe in the theory that India should be for Indians; not for the baboo of India, but for the native princes who had been dispossessed in the past. The claims of the modern educated Brahman he held in contempt. His faith was pinned to the education and training of the hereditary princes still remaining to the country; and he warmly advocated their advancement, hoping that through them the people might be persuaded to accept reforms that they refused to accept—or, at best, accepted sullenly—at the hands of the foreign power.

He was anticipating great things from the Rajah Narayan. The prince's training had been all that could be desired. Shivapore was a State that had hitherto escaped the finger of the reformer. It was a clean page; where all had to be done, nothing to be undone. The wrecked experiment, often the derelict that impedes the progress of succeeding reforms, did not stand in his way. There would be no let or hindrance to any improvements political or municipal that might seem fitting in the young ruler's opinion. In Harlesden's eyes it would be nothing short of a catastrophe if a foolish flirtation should

upset the equilibrium of the Rajah and cause a "reversion to type." That such an entanglement with a European had happened to a native prince was generally known among Indian officials.

There was another reason for disquietude on the part of Harlesden. A twinge of jealousy coloured his criticism. He had no grounds other than what he himself had seen for believing that there was anything more between the Rajah and Delphine than long-established friendship. Narayan was the guest of the house, and it was but right that she should be attentive to the duties of hospitality. This he repeated to himself more than once in his effort to crush a feeling that he knew to be unworthy of himself. It left him disturbed and uncomfortable, and—what was not often the case—self-distrustful.

Another silent observer of the little episode was the Hindu girl. She had withdrawn from the chattering group of which Ted was the centre, and had drifted towards Delphine and the Rajah with a definite purpose at the back of her mind. She wished to greet him and offer her congratulations also, although in a more restrained manner than the English girl. She had heard the words that passed between the two, and from beneath the saree that hooded the beautiful face she watched them both. In the interval that followed his last speech, she advanced, shy, but determined to attain her object. A casual observer would not have suspected the courage and strong will-power that underlay her modesty.

"How do you do, Miss Gopaula," said the Rajah, as she came up. "Were you at the polo match?"

He spoke in an easy, indifferent manner, scarcely glancing at her.

"No, Highness," she replied, using the title by which he would be addressed as soon as he assumed his position in Shivapore. "I am sorry I was unable to

come. I understand that I have missed something worth seeing."

"Indeed, you have, Royama," said Delphine, who was watching the approach of Carter with the tray of coffee.

The servants were busy handing round various dishes to the guests. They understood their duties, and required no supervision. Delphine was therefore free to minister to the needs of the Rajah. She poured out two cups and handed him one, reserving the other for herself.

"Here is your coffee; I made it myself," she said. Then, seeing Royama standing near, she added, "Royama, you will have a cup, won't you? There is plenty."

The butler brought a third cup, poured out the coffee himself, and gave it to her.

"It is excellent," the Rajah was saying, as he sipped it with enjoyment. "The best I have ever had."

"In England?"

"In India as well as in England."

"You are supposed to be past masters in the art of making it in the East," she remarked.

"I assure you that this is a great deal better than the stuff one gets in India," he protested.

"Its flavour is not altogether due to the brewing; the milk is so good. Do have some cake, Royama."

She caught up a dish from the table close at hand and offered it to the girl, who helped herself to a slice. Then she held it towards the Rajah, but he shook his head.

"No, thanks; I'll take a biscuit, if you have such a thing. The cake will spoil the flavour of the coffee."

The biscuits were on a table a few steps away. Delphine fetched them and presented them to her guest.

Harlesden, at a little distance, had been drinking a cup of tea. He came towards the spot where Delphine stood, and put his empty cup down upon the table at her elbow. He might have selected any other for the purpose, but he

chose this, as it brought him within reach of her. He had seen the coffee poured out, and had noted all the gracious acts of hospitality. He tried hard to control his ruffled nerves and to adopt an even geniality. There was no conversation to break up ; but he began to speak as though he intended to turn whatever there was into a new channel.

"Very glad to meet you here, Rajah," he said. "You are going to India before long, I understand."

Ted appeared at this juncture with two men in polo dress. He explained to his sister that they could not stay, as they had to catch a train. While she was occupied in saying good-bye, the Rajah turned an attentive ear to his companion. Royama, seized by a fit of shyness at finding herself alone with two men, slipped away and joined Carrie, who had a dish of chocolate creams in her hand.

"I think of leaving about the end of August," replied the Rajah. "I should like to have remained in England for a little shooting and hunting, but the Dewan has written urging me not to delay my return. He wants to get most of the ceremonies over before the new year."

"Quite right ; that is before the people become absorbed in the temple feasts."

The Rajah listened politely, his attention was elsewhere. Delphine had disappeared in the direction of the house. As he searched for her his eye fell upon the figure of Royama moving about under the wing of Carrie.

"Have a chocolate cream, Mr. Harlesden. Do, Rajah," cried Carrie, advancing and offering her dish.

She did not stay, but passed on, Royama following. The Rajah's eyes dwelt upon the Indian girl. What was it in her appearance that pushed sex into prominence ? Was it something that recalled the zenana and the women in it ? He had not forgotten the unreserved gossip and chatter that went on from morning to night in his father's household. The details were lost in oblivion, but the

subject stood out clearly in his memory. As he watched the movements of the unconscious Indian girl the atmosphere of the zenana came back to him. The recollection was not unpleasant. Then, remembering where he was, the contrast between the family life of the Englishwoman and that of the native lady struck him forcibly.

His wandering thoughts were recalled by Harlesden, who was speaking.

CHAPTER IV.

"YOUR people are looking forward to seeing you take up the reins of government, Rajah," remarked the Political Officer.

"Yes, I suppose so. Regencies are never popular."

"The Dewan is old-fashioned, and follows closely in your father's footsteps. He has done his best; but his best has been to preserve, not to alter. It is left to you to improve and introduce certain reforms."

"By-the-way," exclaimed the Rajah, suddenly, "I wonder if you can tell me something?"

"No doubt I can if it is anything about Shivapore," replied Harlesden, pleased at the thought of having awakened his companion's interest in his inheritance.

"Do you think that the open space in front of the palace could be laid down as a cricket field?"

Harlesden was distinctly taken aback. Cricket in connection with the native State had been as far from his mind as the game of bridge. Outdoor games, such as football, cricket, or golf, had no attraction for him, and he did not see how they could benefit a native prince. In his surprise he could only repeat interrogatively the last words of the Rajah.

"As a cricket field?"

"Yes; I have a vague recollection of its being rocky. The fact was impressed on my mind by experience. Rebelling against the coddling of the zenana, I broke away

from my horsekeeper one day when I was out riding. He had been ordered not to allow me to go beyond walking pace, which I very much resented. I galloped across the space as if I was playing polo, the horsekeeper tearing behind me and shouting for all he was worth. My pony —it was a good little beast—jumped rocks and bushes and scrambled over everything like a cat. I think he enjoyed his liberty just as much as his rider. We came to grief in a kind of marsh near the garden."

"It has been turned into a lake," said Harlesden.

"Couldn't we clear a portion of the park from the boulders, treat the bed-rock with a little dynamite, and lay down quite a respectable cricket pitch? The lake will be convenient for watering it."

"It might do," said Harlesden, without any corresponding show of enthusiasm. "But who would play? There is no cricket club in Shivapet."

"I should play," replied the Rajah, decisively. "Some of the young men could be taught. I must see about having it cleared of jungle and levelled as soon as I get back. From what I remember of its situation, it ought to make a first class cricket ground. And the race-course; is that in good condition?"

Delphine, having done her duty to the departing guests returned in time to hear the Rajah's question. She plunged into the conversation without a thought that she might be —in Harlesden's opinion, at any rate—intruding.

"A race-course! Have you a race-course at Shivapet?"

He stiffened slightly. There were still many guests sitting and strolling about the terrace. If she did her duty as a hostess, she ought to be seeking them out and talking to them. With a hope that she might take a hint, he said—

"You really must ask someone else to tell you about these matters."

Poor man! He had little experience of women.

"Oh, come now, Mr. Harlesden, don't be so disagreeable!" she said, with the same freedom of speech she had used to the Rajah. "Put on your thinking-cap and try to remember. Now, is there a race-course at Shivapet?"

It was impossible to resist her, and his stiffness melted.

"There is a level piece of ground that goes by that name; but it hasn't been used for the purpose within my memory."

"Oh, that's all right. The Rajah will soon have it ship-shape. Now, tell us something about the palace. What can you remember of it, Rajah?"

"I recall a rambling old rabbit-warren of a building attached to a huge durbar hall. I believe there are over a hundred rooms in it."

"Is one of them a ball-room?" asked Delphine.

"I really cannot remember," replied the Rajah. "Do you know, Mr. Harlesden?"

"I think there is a fair-sized hall next to the durbar hall, with a good boarded floor; but it wants repairing and redecorating."

Delphine turned to the Rajah. "It must be done as soon as you arrive, Rajah. You will have to give some dances while we are with you."

"With pleasure. You shall have as many as you please. Is there any special colour you would like for the ball-room?"

"White and gold. Any other colour would clash with the dresses of your nobles," said Delphine, as if it were the most natural thing in the world for her to arrange such details for a Rajah.

Harlesden listened with his mind in a whirl. He looked from one to the other, wondering how far this new influence in the Rajah's life extended, and whether it would increase.

"What about a theatre?" asked Delphine, eager to fathom the depth of practicable amusements in Shivapet.

The Rajah searched his memory for any recollection of a building that could be called a theatre, but without success. He could get no further than an indistinct vision of flapping canvas, tent ropes, and a rough boarded platform, badly lighted with oil lamps and flaming torches distributing as much smoke as light upon the scene.

"I don't think we can boast of possessing a pukka-built theatre. We are not quite so far advanced, are we, Mr. Harlesden?"

"I have never heard of one. Your father did not find a theatre necessary."

"Did you have no theatrical performances?" asked Delphine of the Rajah.

"Indeed, we did," he responded. "They were given by strolling companies."

"Where? In the durbar hall?"

"A tent was pitched in the palace grounds, and the performers had to accommodate their piece to their surroundings. I must say they were very clever in adapting themselves."

"You can remember going to see them?" asked Delphine.

"Rather! There was intense excitement in the palace on their arrival. I have a vivid recollection of my joy at being allowed to go to the play with my father instead of having to sit in the crowded curtained part arranged for the women. A dark blue purdah of thin muslin was hung between the players and the zenana ladies. As there were no lights behind the curtain, the dark blue muslin formed a very effectual screen through which they could see fairly well, whilst they could be seen by no one."

"What was the performance like?" asked Delphine.

"It was the strangest mixture of magnificence and shabbiness you ever saw. I thought it splendid at the time; but my father, although he knew nothing of your English

stage, could not have shared my opinion. He was asleep most of the time, and only roused himself when the nautch girls danced. Why he went at all I can't think."

"He went to please the people," said Harlesden. "They wouldn't have enjoyed it if their prince had not been present; and the players would have considered themselves slighted."

"It was very good of him," commented the Rajah. "An Indian play would seem a dreary affair to you, Miss Dersingham. There are no footlights, no scenery, no orchestra except a tomtom and a pipe. The players dress as they please, and with a very limited wardrobe; and the play begins at eight in the morning."

"Don't you mean eight at night, Rajah?" asked Delphine.

"No; I mean eight in the morning, and not a minute later. It continues at intervals all day and half the night, and the piece lasts two or three days."

"How tired the audience must be!"

"Far from it. Sometimes the young men take a week's holiday and follow the company to their next stopping place, to see it all over again."

"What wonderful enthusiasm! Your father was wise not to give them a theatre. He would never have got rid of them."

"I will build a theatre," said the Rajah, "and we will try to raise the standard of the drama for them. They shall be introduced to scenery, an orchestra, footlights and a drop-scene."

"Splendid!" cried Delphine, using an expression that was frequently on her lips. "But we must put a time limit to your native players."

"They shall keep to their tents," said the Rajah.

He had fallen into her humour, and would have promised her anything she chose to ask for, possibly provoked

thereto by the look on Harlesden's face. It reminded him of an expression he had seen in his schooldays on the countenance of a form master when the spirits of the boys were a little more elated than usual. It never failed to be provocative of a spirit of mischief in the old times, and he felt its influence now.

Royama, seeing that Delphine had returned, drew near again, forsaking Carrie, who was having an animated discussion with Ted on the merits of the Dersingham ponies, which, she contended, were better than the Rajah's. Her experience with horses was confined to the cob that drew the vicarage carriage. Ted, with his innate antipathy to anything in the shape of a mis-statement, was endeavouring to convince her that the Rajah, having more means at his command, was better mounted than himself.

"What are you planning, Delphine?" asked Royama.

"The Rajah has promised to build a theatre at Shivapet. You know what the English stage is like, Royama. We mean to introduce it to the Rajah's people."

"I don't know where you will find your companies, unless you send to England for them," remarked Harlesden.

"We will get up theatricals among ourselves," answered Delphine, before the Rajah could reply. "I will act, and you shall act too, Rajah. Perhaps some of your Court will help." She turned to Royama, who was listening in wonder to these proposed innovations in the city she had dubbed "dear, sleepy old Shivapet." "You must learn to act, Royama. It is the easiest thing in the world; and to dance as well."

With an ease and grace that were as natural to her as is the wheeling flight to the swallow, she executed a few waltz steps round the shrinking figure of the Indian girl.

Royama shot a swift, apprehensive glance at the Rajah. He alone fully understood the unintentional offence that

lurked beneath the suggestion. Harlesden was not altogether ignorant. Dancing in India among natives is confined exclusively to the class of women unmentioned in society in England. In quick response to the silent appeal to his chivalry that the Rajah read in his countrywoman's eyes, he replied directly to Delphine herself.

"We shall have to excuse Miss Gopaula. Native ladies never dance. It is not—the fashion. As for myself, I will do anything you like, Miss Dersingham, act with you, dance with you, play golf with you, ride and hunt with you. And you will join us too, won't you, Mr. Harlesden?"

The appeal went straight to the heart of the Resident, who was able to appreciate his championship of Royama. If the Rajah always exercised the same good judgment, he need have little fear for the future.

"I shall be very glad to help as far as I can, though I don't act or dance. There is riding and hunting, both of which I am sure you will enjoy, Miss Dersingham."

At that moment Ted came up with Carrie, who exclaimed enviously, as she caught Harlesden's last sentence—

"Oh, shouldn't I like it?"

"My mother wants to see the ponies, and I have sent for them," said Ted.

"May we see yours too, Rajah?" asked Carrie.

"With pleasure," he answered, making a movement towards the house.

"All right, don't trouble," said Ted, stopping him. "They will all come round from the stables together."

"The dear ponies!" added Carrie. "They know quite as much about the game as their masters. Come, Royama —Delphine, you must see them too."

She linked her arm in Delphine's and drew her away, Royama following. They joined Mrs. Dersingham, who, with a number of her friends was looking over the balustrade while waiting for the ponies to be brought along the gravel

path below the terrace. Although Delphine had not given the Rajah an invitation to come too, it was evidently his intention not to be left behind.

"Shall we go and look at the animals? I am taking mine out to Shivapet," he said to Harlesden.

"Rather a risk, isn't it?" replied Harlesden, without moving.

"If I can get them there safely they ought to do very well in the climate of Shivapet, quite as well as the Australians."

He made a step or two towards the others, when Harlesden laid a hand on his arm.

"One moment. Just a word."

The Rajah stopped politely, but his eyes dwelt on the retreating figure of Delphine and the Political Officer was aware that he had only half the attention of his companion.

"You mustn't be persuaded in the kindness of your heart to allow too many innovations at Shivapore."

"Of course not," assented the Rajah.

"You must bear in mind that you are going back to Shivapore to govern the State. Your father was a good old-fashioned conservative; and he was opposed to change. We want to move on a little but we don't want the pendulum to swing to the other extreme."

"We?" said the Rajah, quietly.

Harlesden with the instinct of the diplomatist recognized that he had not expressed himself in a manner that would best forward the cause he had at heart. He hastened to rectify it.

"I mean nothing derogatory to your dignity. You are aware that I am a representative of the Power that upholds your throne. As Resident at Shivapore I am responsible to the supreme Government for the peace and quiet of the State and the personal security of its Prince. Please don't run away with the idea that I have any arbitrary powers,

My line of action is all laid down in black and white. In following it out I am nothing but a servant. To you belongs a certain amount of independent power very different from that of the English civil servant. Pardon me Rajah, if I show anxiety over the welfare of your State."

The moment for a lecture on state-craft was not wisely chosen. Harlesden knew this, and had it not been for the influence of another reason, he would probably not have attempted to deliver it. For that same unrecognized reason, the Rajah fretted at his unnecessary detention. It required an effort on his part to restrain the growing impatience that prompted an abrupt cutting short of the lecture. He contented himself with saying—

"Oh, certainly. I quite understand."

Again his eyes were drawn towards the merry party on the terrace. That Delphine's tongue was not silent could be seen by the laughing faces of those near her.

"You will have to go slowly with your people," continued Harlesden, "and introduce reforms gradually."

"However much they are needed?"

A sudden sense of humour lightened the situation for the Rajah, as he again recalled the schoolroom and his form master.

"Yes; there must be no haste," said Harlesden, without a suspicion that he was affording the other any amusement.

"Very well, we will begin in moderation. What do you consider is most needed at the present moment, Mr. Harlesden?"

"The palace, the residency, and the town want gas badly. We are still using oil lamps."

"Then we will have gas at once, good coal gas; not political gas such as you have been manufacturing lately in this country."

Harlesden stared at him, and then laughed as he caught a twinkle in his eye. He was not at all displeased to find the conversation taking a lighter tone, nor did he mind a tendency on the part of the Rajah to poke fun at his mentor if he would at the same time listen. The lecture was not ended; there were more reasons for continuing it than the giving of good advice to the young ruler.

"Another thing is needed badly in the city, and that is a good supply of water for drinking and bathing purposes. Dr. Constable has been urging it for some time past."

"We will give them their water supply," assented the Rajah; "and draw the line rigidly at bath-clubs and mixed bathing. Never mind, Mr. Harlesden; I can't help it. You are taking my duties so seriously."

"It is a serious subject; and, joking apart, Rajah, I want you to regard it as such," replied Harlesden, in a friendly manner that could not fail to imply trust and confidence.

"Well and good," responded the Rajah. "As long as I have only to be solemn over your precious municipal reforms, I shall not object."

"And politics," added Harlesden, the national movement in his mind as he spoke.

"Most assuredly. Let there be no levity over politics in Shivapore. We will draw the line at elections, for instance."

"Elections," repeated Harlesden, not seeing the drift of his companion's words. "They are no laughing matter."

"Don't you think so? Dersingham and I found a good deal of amusement in the last here."

"Possibly. However, I am thankful to say that the constitution of the Shivapore State does not necessitate any elections. You nominate your Council."

"I am glad to hear it. Fortunately for me, as well as for several other and greater reigning princes, I inherit the throne. I should be sorry to have to contest it with my Dewan, who, you say, has ruled wisely since my father's death, although his policy has not been a forward policy. I'll bet you a fiver, Mr. Harlesden, that the Dewan would win with a thumping majority if it came to a contest between us by ballot."

The Resident could not help smiling at the mere thought of a wager between himself, the representative of Government, and a native prince on a hypothetical political event.

"I advise you not to bet, Rajah."

"You think my nobles won't pay up if I win?"

"Your father was not in the habit of betting."

"Being so strongly wedded to the ways of his ancestors, it would not be in his line, eh?" replied the Rajah, lightly. "If I duly attend to the affairs of State, you will agree that I may employ the rest of my time as I please. It will be in sport, and those games which the men of England regard as necessary to preserve their health."

"By all means follow what pleasures you fancy, always bearing in mind that pleasure should not interfere with your duties to the State——"

The Rajah interrupted him with one of his rapid changes of mood that were characteristic.

"You have mentioned my duties to the State before. May I ask you to define them?"

"They are first to administer the law as far as lies in your power."

"I understand."

"Secondly, to respect the traditions of your own religion, and the religion of your people. As you are aware, theirs is of a lower form than yours and that of your nobles."

"Naturally, I should preserve my father's policy, and

refrain from interfering with either the temple revenues or buildings."

"It is possible, following the time-honoured traditions of Shivapet, something more may be required of you than passivity. There are occasions when the people wish to see you among them——"

"Right-oh!" interrupted the Rajah, with the slang of the Englishmen of the day, which sounded odd to Harlesden's ears, coming from the mouth of an Indian ruler. "Is that all?" continued the Rajah, who was of the opinion that he had listened with exemplary patience, and had had enough counsel for the time being. "I see the ponies have arrived, and I should like to go and have a look at them."

"There is one more duty I ought to mention," said Harlesden, laying a detaining hand upon his arm.

"What is it?" asked the Rajah, with a touch of curiosity.

"You must marry."

"Marry!" said the Rajah, his attention rivetted at last. "Marry!" The sound of hoofs upon the gravel below the balustrade fell on their ears. "Marry and have a son to inherit the name—a fair boy, who shall play polo like his father!"

He lifted his head and glanced across the terrace. Harlesden knew which particular figure the eyes sought. As he gazed, Delphine turned in his direction. She smiled and waved her hand towards the ponies with unmistakeable invitation.

"Ah! to marry—and have a son!"

He shook off the detaining hand, and walked with rapid steps to join her. Seeing him coming, she drew away from the crowd and advanced to meet him, her eyes alight with that superabundance of vitality which Harlesden deprecated when it was displayed for the Rajah's benefit.

As the Political Agent noted every detail, his mind misgave him.

"Have I overdone it? Is it possible that in sending him to England we have made the mistake of putting new wine into old bottles?"

CHAPTER V.

THE Rajah Narayan had described his palace at Shivapet accurately when he called it a rabbit-warren.

It stood in large grounds in the very centre of the town. The park or compound was surrounded by a wall. The space enclosed was sufficient to allow of a lake of ornamental water. Some fine banyan trees, groups of palms, an avenue of neem trees, and a belt of various other kinds, in which the jak predominated, found plenty of room to grow and flourish.

The ground near the palace had been laid out as a garden, but oleanders, Persian roses, jasmine and gardenias were the only flowering plants cultivated. They grew in wild profusion, without the restraining influence of the pruning knife, and their beauty was lost in the untidy appearance that they gave to the garden.

The palace itself was in three blocks, each having three stories. The blocks formed part of a large square courtyard. The fourth side of the yard was walled in, and it was entered by a fortified gateway—called the main-guard gate—flanked by sentry-boxes and having a guard-room above. Some sowars, armed with lances and wearing spurs, did sentry-go before the gate. They were part of the Rajah's bodyguard—a fine corps, which succeeded the rabble army abolished with the establishment of the British power.

The centre block held the durbar hall, the audience

chamber and ball-room, with their anterooms. In the right block were the private apartments of the Rajah. The left, including the upper storey of the centre, was assigned to the ladies of the palace and their retinue.

With the exception of the State apartments, the rooms, numbering over a hundred, were small and insignificant. Though they seemed by their meagre dimensions to have been planned with a view to economy of space, the intricate and numerous passages that led to them suggested an extravagance of room truly oriental. No method had been observed in their construction. Some of the passages were nothing but verandahs closely screened with wooden shutters. Others burrowed sinuously into the very heart of the building, turning in eccentric fashion to the right and left. All were in semi-darkness; and unexpected stone stairs, even darker and narrower than the passages, occurred here and there. Several seemed to exist only for the benefit of a single chamber. These inner passages were badly lighted by day and wrapped in entire darkness by night. The walls had been whitewashed in the remote past; and the cement floor, worn and broken away in many parts, was unswept and uncarpetted. A frowsy atmosphere pervaded the whole palace, suggesting dire need of open windows and a renewed supply of fresh air.

For the most part, the rooms matched the passages in every respect. There were but few windows looking out upon the grounds, and those that existed were built high up in the walls, so that the occupants of the rooms were unable to reach them. Though beyond the reach of the idle and the curious—who might be tempted to waste their time by gazing at the outer world—they were jealously screened with venetian shutters, that let in light and dust, but rigorously excluded all glimpse of the busy world outside the walls of the palace.

Pillared verandahs on the side of the courtyard

ran the length of the building. Broad blinds of split bamboo hung down between the white columns. They were never raised night nor day, but were fastened down permanently by knotted ropes to iron rings let into the floor. Neither the furious blast of the cyclone nor the strong young hand of the inquisitive maid could move them aside more than three or four inches.

The effect of the venetian shutters and bamboo blinds was to give the palace a blank, forbidding appearance, suggesting the absence of the owners or the presence of death.

The hot sun beat in summer upon the cream-coloured walls, and the dry wind curled in eddies round the corners, carrying dust and sun-burned leaves in columns above the terraced roof. The grit percolated through the venetians into the rooms, which rarely came under the cleansing influence of the housemaid's duster, and lodged upon cornice and coping. That which fell upon the floor was daily removed by the sweeper's broom, the floor being the only part that received any attention.

When the monsoon wind brought rain, the downpour was driven against walls and shutters and blinds. If any of the moisture found its way inside through the venetians, rugs that might chance to lie spread were rolled up, and cushions placed out of reach of the splashing drops. The rain made no more impression upon the building and its invisible inhabitants than the sun.

The sleepy appearance of the palace entirely belied the character of its internal life. A hive of bees after sunset seems to be the abode of sleep and silence for all the movement that is visible; but this repose is not to be trusted. Place the ear to the warm straw structure, and one learns that its inner world is full of business. It seems to the listener as if every bee of that innumerable multitude is hard at work. It is the hum of a town of strenuous labourers, and not the drowsy murmur of a slumbering people.

The inmates of the palace of Shivapet could not be compared with bees in respect to work. Busy they might be, but their labours had little to show in the way of results. The activity was mostly confined to their tongues. Neither needlework nor the cultivation of any of the fine arts found favour in their eyes. The only occupation that was practised and thoroughly mastered was cooking; and even in this there was no attempt at variety or originality. Yet every woman in the zenana was interested in the making of curries and kabobs, pickles and preserves and chutnies. From the Ranees themselves down to the small daughter of the poorest dependent, all took a deep interest in the preparation of the meals for the day.

The late Rajah, when he died, left four widows. They were considerably younger than their joint husband. The reason for their existence was this. On the death of the mother of Narayan, which happened when he was four years old, there arose a great dispute among the relatives of the Rajah as to who should be the head of the zenana. Numerous aunts, sisters, and sisters-in-law claimed each to be the senior lady.

It may seem an unimportant matter or one that can easily be settled; but this is not the case. There are certain privileges attached to the envied post which only belong to the recognized head of a Hindu zenana. The lady may be the grandmother, mother, aunt, or wife of the man. It depends entirely upon circumstances; but once acknowledged and established, she rules her side of the house with autocratic power.

In addition to arranging the expenditure of the income as far as the domestic requirements are concerned, she has the honour of performing for the women the private family devotions. It is she and she alone who has the right to chant the morning hymn of praise to the Deity; to take the sacred image from its shrine and to make the votive

offerings. She rings the bell that summons the rest of the household; and she conducts the pujah, short and simple though it may be, in which they join.

When, therefore, the head of the zenana died, there was a continuous struggle among the Rajah's relatives for the coveted post of honour. His presence was the signal for a clamour of tongues that well-nigh drove him crazy. He determined to put an end to the difficulty by marrying again. To prevent a like trouble should his wife die, he decided to wed four ladies instead of one. It was beyond all probability that the four would be carried off by death at once. If one or even two were to succumb to an epidemic, there would still be left more than sufficient to take up the reins of government without strife.

To save trouble and expense in this masterstroke of matrimony he arranged to marry the four brides together. The ceremonies were long and tedious, extending over many days, and most of them could be made to fit all four cases without repetition. The personal rites for each individual bride were performed in regular succession, giving the Ranees their order of precedence, so as to preclude any subsequent confusion in the event of a death in their ranks.

The senior Ranee, Sitrama, was the daughter of a prince, and, on this account, she was elected as chief. The other three had the honour of being connected with noble houses, but they were not the daughters of a reigning rajah.

Sitrama was suitably chosen, and she took up her position with the authority of one born to rule. Under her hand the turmoil in the zenana ceased as if by magic. Yet her task was not an easy one. When the brides were first immured at Shivapet, acting under advice instilled by their relatives before they were married, a demand was made by each for a separate establishment. It was but natural that every Ranee should wish to possess a little

kingdom of her own; to have a separate allowance, and to occupy a suite of rooms where she ruled supreme.

This proposal was not at all to Sitrama's mind. On one of the nights—when it was her turn to enjoy the Rajah's company—under the excuse of feeding him with some new and specially prepared sweetmeats, she managed to keep him awake long enough to lay the case before him and explain it from her point of view. With a torrent of speech that lasted till the small hours of the morning, she proved to him over and over again that the plan would not work for peace. It was bad enough, as he had already experienced, to have no head to the palace zenana; but it would be infinitely worse to institute four independent heads, who would be responsible to no one for expenditure or for the orderliness of the zenana. It would create endless rivalry, and her own seniority, which he had himself established by making her senior Ranee, would be in jeopardy. The dependents and servants of the four households would be always quarrelling; and, as for the exchequer, did he believe that the revenues of Shivapore or of any other State could properly support what would resolve itself into four zenanas? The great white Emperor himself, whose rule extended from the Himalayas to Cape Comerin, had only one zenana, because of the expense it would entail.

The Rajah, a quiet, peace-loving individual, well over fifty years of age, was more than convinced of the truth of her arguments, even though he fell asleep at intervals and only heard half of them. On one point he was satisfied; that she was strong enough in her personality to uphold his decree and to maintain her position, if he definitely informed the other Ranees that there could be only one zenana in the palace, one head to that zenana, and one household under that head.

The order was accordingly issued. The three younger Ranees were permitted to occupy their own suites of rooms,

and to employ a reasonable number of poor relations in their service; but the chief authority rested with the senior.

Under Sitrama's rule the arrangement worked admirably. She assumed her position and held it; nor did any one of the other three Ranees ever show sign of rebellion. To her credit it may be said that, with all her autocratic firmness, she treated every one with kindness and showed no favour. There is nothing more keenly appreciated in the East than rectitude and justice, because, perhaps, it is not over common. On their part, the Ranees submitted gracefully, and settled down in contentment.

The latter days of the Rajah were passed in greater comfort and quiet than might be supposed possible for a man who in his old age had married four wives, and brought them to live with him under the same roof.

It was a fortunate thing that this gigantic effort at matrimony proved unproductive. The birth of a child to any one but the senior Ranee would have upset the balance of power and created new situations difficult to adjust. In the case of the senior Ranee it might well have bred mischief if the child were a son. A deep-seated jealousy towards the rightful heir would have been inevitable, as Sitrama was a woman of ambition as well as of power, and it might also have been the cause of unscrupulous intrigue, perpetrated under a sense of duty to her own son.

In the absence of offspring, the four childless women centred their affections on the motherless Narayan, and did their best to ruin him by adulation and the fostering of every kind of indulgence calculated to enervate the boy.

There were tears and lamentation when the princesses were informed that they were to be deprived of the company of their darling son. One mother seeing hers off to school for the first time was nothing compared with the four weeping women bidding farewell to the ungrateful, indifferent youngster who hailed with delight his

emancipation from the zenana. It was only natural that Narayan should be counting the moments to the sailing of the big ship that was to take him over the black water to that Eldorado of delight, the white man's home.

The Rajah went to Bombay with the boy, ostensibly to see him off. He took the opportunity of going on to Calcutta to pay a state visit to the Viceroy, pleading as his excuse the necessity of making a request in person for the addition of two guns to his official salute. He had only nine. He desired eleven, an increase recently granted to another Indian Rajah, whose State was, if anything, a little smaller than Shivapore.

From Calcutta he arranged to pass on to Benares to attend a religious festival, but he kept his intention secret lest Sitrama should express a desire to join him in his pilgrimage. The news was brought to the palace by the Dewan Chakravarti too late for the senior Ranee to make any plans that would include herself in the expedition.

By the time the Rajah returned to Shivapore the wind was tempered to the four shorn lambs, and their grief was softened in the excitement of more recent events—one being the birth in the zenana of a nephew to the second Ranee; another the prospective marriage of a sister of the third Ranee.

Sitrama, herself, had found a diversion in the remarriage of her father, to which her consent had been cordially given after she had received a handsome present of jewels that had once belonged to her mother.

On the return of the Rajah life in the palace, as well as in the city and in the State, ran with a smoothness akin to dullness. There was no ruffling of the surface of the backwater until the Rajah himself died. The illness was short, but not unexpected, as he had been failing for some months.

In due course he was burned. The funeral ceremonies requiring the presence of the son were postponed until the

return of the latter from England. Thanks to the beneficence of the British Government, the four Ranees survived their lord and master, and were not required to perform suttee, as would undoubtedly have been the case had they lived a century earlier. Their heads were shaved and their jewels were laid aside never more to be worn by them. Their coloured silk and gold-embroidered sarees were folded and put away in camphor-wood chests. When the young Rajah should bring a bride to the zenana she would be decked and adorned with the silks and gems that had once been theirs. European women are spared this disposal of their effects before death; it is one of the pains of widowhood in India.

For some years previous to his death, the old Rajah had the benefit of the assistance of Chakravarti as Dewan, or prime minister. In the absence of the heir, the latter became Regent, a post he was well-fitted to fill.

He was of the same mind as his beloved master, conservative and opposed to all change. Absolutely loyal to the superior power that afforded protection to the State, he realized fully that the protection brought peace, such peace as was not recorded anywhere in the pages of Shivapore's past history.

The Dewan had given an unwilling consent to the course of education prescribed for the young prince. Had it not been for a very definite expression of opinion on the part of the English Resident, Harlesden's predecessor, it was possible that the arrangement might have been overruled by the Rajah's prime minister.

On the death of the Rajah, however, Chakravarti was entirely reconciled to the absence of the heir. Narayan, had he been in Shivapore, would have been considered old enough to take up the reins of government, especially if he were aided by a strong council. Being in England, with the greater part of his career before him, it was thought

best that he should complete his course, and that the Dewan should be nominated Regent in his absence.

Chakravarti, with the mantle of the old Rajah upon his shoulders, made an excellent ruler in the public opinion of Shivapore. Harlesden did not share this opinion altogether. He would have liked an advance, or, failing any actual forward movement, a preparation of the ground for reform.

In sounding the Dewan on the introduction of a water supply into Shivapet, he found that he was opposed to all change, and there was no response. He pressed the Dewan, and the latter openly declared that it would be advisable to wait for the new ruler's arrival; he himself felt incompetent to make an advance.

"Men look for new tricks from the young elephant; they distrust them in the old, and are apt to suspect that all is not well," said the Dewan.

"We might begin to pave the way for reform; it would assist the young Rajah," urged Harlesden, who had the cause very much at heart.

The Regent politely disagreed. "Young men expect to wear new garments. The young Rajah will cast aside with contempt any that he finds have been worn by older men before him, even though they may be serviceable. Let him begin from the beginning. The blame, if blame there be, will lie upon the young back that is strong enough to bear it."

"You are only half-hearted over the improvements I desire to see in Shivapore," said Harlesden, with something like reproach.

The Dewan looked at him sadly, as though he despaired of ever making him comprehend the difficulties that studded the path of improvement along Western lines.

"Sir, I know Shivapore; I understand the people. The dhoby's donkey is less uneasy carrying the bundle on its back to which it is by long habit accustomed, than in

wearing the dhoby's turban on its head, to which it is not accustomed. Our prince may be able to convince the people that they will be benefited by the change; but it is not for me to be their teacher."

"You might prepare the ground——"

"Your pardon, sir! I could not. Let the young elephant do his own trumpeting before putting his shoulder to the task the gods have given him to do, and let the old retire to the peace and quiet of the jungle."

CHAPTER VI.

The Dewan and the senior Ranee were excellent friends. He had never set eyes upon her person; she was but a voice behind a purdah. Curiosity, however, on the subject of her attractions did not trouble him. He had his own zenana, and it was well peopled with women of all ages. Children had been born to him. Some were married, and had already been blessed with offspring—considered in the East to be the crown of every married couple. He could imagine what the Rajah's wives were like without seeing them. He could gauge their curiosity and their vanity by his experience at home, and was quite at his ease when occasion necessitated an interview.

The curtain that divided the senior Ranee and her following from the outer world was not altogether opaque. Whilst screening her and her companions entirely from sight, it was sufficiently transparent to allow of an indistinct view of visitors. They appeared silhouetted against the light. Details of dress and feature were almost entirely lost.

The Ranee Sitrama had thoroughly learned the outline of Chakravarti's figure. He was tall and spare and slightly bent. He had an aquiline nose and thin-lipped mouth, features noticeable in men of high caste. They awoke no admiration on the part of the ladies of the palace. The standard of masculine beauty in the zenana was stoutness of figure, to which the Rajah was inclined in his latter days.

Spareness bespoke anxiety, and the practice of economy. As far as Sitrama and her bevy of followers were concerned, the prime minister had nothing in the way of good looks to commend him in the eyes of the opposite sex.

The curtain behind which the ladies of the zenana sat when they wished to interview the outer world was hung across one of the rooms of the centre block. An elderly woman acted as doorkeeper and custodian of the key, and was responsible for any abuse of this outlet of the zenana. She was not purdanasheen, although she veiled herself whenever she had occasion to speak to man, a little piece of pride which no one resented. A good education acquired in a mission-school had given her a knowledge of English, and enabled her to serve as interpreter to Dr. Constable until he had learned the language.

On the inner side of the curtain had been placed a raised platform, or dais, which occupied half the space allotted to the Ranees. It allowed them to be seated as they spoke with their visitor, who either remained standing or was given a chair on the other side of the curtain. Unless the person honoured with an interview was of importance, he was supposed to stand. There was thus little inducement to prolong the conversation, and the inhabitant of the outer world escaped as quickly as possible.

For the use of the Dewan, Dr. Constable, and Harlesden, (the last rarely found it necessary to call upon the Ranees), a chair was placed close to the curtain, and the dragon of a doorkeeper intimated that the visitor might, if he liked, take a seat. Conversation with a screen between the principal persons engaged possessed few attractions, and was apt to be tedious to sustain.

After the arrival of the English mail one day towards the end of August, the Dewan sent to know if he might have the honour of an interview with the senior Ranee on the following morning.

A chair upholstered in red plush and richly gilt was placed ready, and the Dewan, more punctual than usual, took his seat. The Ranee was even with the Dewan in the matter of keeping appointments. Her custom was to make everyone wait. The only person who had succeeded in defeating her was Dr. Constable, the palace physician. He gave her ten minutes grace, and if she did not appear he retired, and was not seen on the place until at least six hours had elapsed. This, when she was suffering pain from indigestion, was not at all to her liking, and he rarely had to complain. With the Dewan she ventured on a twenty minutes' delay, a period of time sufficient to impress on him her importance.

To-day there was news in the air. The Dewan's messenger mentioned the fact that a letter had been received from the young Rajah. The Ranee concluded that it must contain important information, since an audience was requested. It probably related to the return of the heir. If so, it would be the signal for the commencement of a long series of religious and State ceremonies that would keep the palace in a ferment of excitement for some months.

Instead of making the Dewan wait her pleasure, she could with difficulty restrain her impatience and remain quietly in her room until his arrival was announced by the old doorkeeper, Amabai. The Regent had a shrewd suspicion of the emotion he aroused; his thin lips curved into a smile of amusement as within two minutes of having occupied the chair, he heard the rustle of the ladies' arrival behind the curtain.

Followed by the three other Ranees and at least twenty women of various ages, Sitrama, on learning that her visitor had arrived, hastened down the insignificant stone staircase leading to the audience chamber.

The swish of Indian silk and the fall of naked feet accompanied by chink of silver and gold ornaments, warned

the Regent that the senior Ranee had arrived and taken her seat. As for the attendants they were not his affair. His business was solely with the Ranee Sitrama. Any information that he had to impart would be given to her. At the same time he replied courteously to any one of the other Ranees if they put questions to him.

He rose and touched his forehead with the fingers of both hands by way of salutation to the women he had never seen. Whether they returned it or not he had no means of knowing.

He sat down again upon the velvet chair, and, being wedded to old fashions, he drew up both his feet tailor-fashion and tucked them away beneath him after the manner of his forebears.

The inquisitive women whose experience did not go beyond the palace walls, were much exercised in their minds over Dr. Constable's method of sitting when he occupied the chair. He never drew up his legs like the Dewan, but kept his feet upon the ground. After long discussions, it was decided among them that he would have been more at his ease could he have followed the example of the Dewan; but his boots prevented him from assuming the attitude. Everything went by contraries with the governing race. It was their method of showing their superiority. When they discovered on their arrival in India that the Indians uncovered their feet and covered their head, the Emperor issued an order that the reverse was to be observed. All Englishmen were to bare their heads and wear shoes upon their feet tied securely with strings that could not come unfastened.

After an exchange of polite inquiries of a general nature, concerning the health of the two households, the Dewan plunged into business at once.

"I have asked to see your Highness because I have heard from England."

"Our son is well, I hope? What news does he send?"

The Dewan recognized the voice of the Ranee Sitrama. It had a wonderful power of penetration, and could be heard above all others.

"That he is returning to Shivapore."

The faint sound of a flutter greeted this announcement, not unlike the subdued cooing of pigeons in their cot.

"When may we expect him here?"

The letters received by the Regent definitely stated that the Rajah would arrive in the middle of September. This was too large a slice of information to be given in one sentence.

"His Highness proposes to leave England before the new year."

"Pah! You told us that, Dewan Bahadur, six months ago. Have you nothing fresh to say?"

"And it is possible that he will arrive in Shivapet, if he does not stay in Calcutta, before—er—the new year."

This was greeted by another expression of impatience.

"When does his honour the Political Agent return?"

The question, like the rest, was asked in a shrill voice, with disconcerting abruptness. In putting it the Ranee showed some cunning, for it was extremely probable that the Political Agent would arrive about the same time as the Rajah.

"He says that he will be back some time in the autumn."

"There is then no reason why I should not go on a visit of four months to my father. He is a very old man, and he desires to see me before he dies."

A look of surprise spread over the faces of the other Ranees. This was the first they had heard of any such intention. It was an important event for them when the senior Ranee left the zenana, as it devolved on the second to take over command. In the dim light of the curtained room they caught a glance from her eye that left them in

no doubt as to her real design. The Dewan, being unable to see the glances, could not interpret them, and fell into the trap.

"It will not do for your Highness to be absent when the Rajah arrives," he said.

"I see no reason for my presence in Shivapet until after the new year."

"As soon as the Rajah comes, his caste must be restored, and the funeral ceremonies in which the son takes part must be performed. Your Highness's presence at that time is necessary with the three other honourable widows."

"Let the Rajah return by the beginning of the new year, and I will come back at the same time——" said the penetrating voice, which the Dewan interrupted.

"The Rajah will be here before the new year."

"Let him wait for my return."

"The time will be too long."

"What is two months?"

"It will be more than two months to wait."

"Then I will make my visit to my father of three months duration instead of four."

"That also will not bring your Highness back in time. The visit to your honourable father had better be paid when all the ceremonies are completed. Then there will be no hurry to return."

"With the restoration of caste they will take at least thirty days. Then there will be the enthroning, afterwards his marriage; at all these my presence is necessary." The Ranee spoke from her own point of view. "Thus it will be nearly half a year before I can look upon the revered face of my father. It is too long, Dewan Bahadur. Rather let the young wait than the old. A father's claim comes before a son's. There is plenty of time for me to pay my visit between now and the end of the year."

The Dewan was getting a little anxious lest the masterful

lady should upset important State arrangements. Although some of the ceremonies could be performed without her, her presence was desirable in others. It was she, if custom was followed, who would have a voice in the choice of a bride for the Rajah ; and the mind of the Dewan was already busy with a scheme that should bring honour to his own house.

"The Rajah, most excellent Highness, will be back before the end of the year."

It was as well that he could not detect the triumphant glance given by the Ranee to her sister widows as much as to say, "See how we are getting the best of this foolish old man!"

"Possibly I might shorten my visit to two months, although it would cause some inconvenience to my people."

"A suggestion worthy of consideration—if you went at once."

"I cannot leave the palace for at least three weeks."

The voice grew a trifle more shrill and strident, and though the Dewan had the best of reasons for not wishing to offend he could not resist getting in a stroke that he knew would tell.

"It would be better to defer the visit. If, however, it must be made, then we shall be obliged to do the best we can with the second Ranee acting in your Highness's place. It would be a pity. The late Rajah himself made choice of your excellency to be the head, and it would be his wish that you should maintain that position. On the other hand, it would be quite possible in your Highness's enforced absence, for the second Ranee to act."

This was a distinct score on the side of the Regent. The thought of another occupying her place made the Ranee's blood run cold. The second Ranee gave her an apologetic glance, and turned the palms of her hands outwards in deprecation of such a revolutionary action.

"Let him wait! let him wait!" screamed the senior Ranee.

"The English Government will issue an order; and after that there will be no waiting."

"I can return in the middle of October."

"It will be too late."

"The beginning of the month."

"Too late."

With this admission the four Ranees again looked at each other and smiled. It was clear that the young Rajah would arrive some time in September.

It would have saved time and trouble if the Dewan had made the simple announcement in reply to the Ranee's first question; but, in that case, he would have lost prestige in his own opinion and the pleasure of seeming to rule the destinies of others. The ladies on their side would not have had the delight of hunting down the information they craved for. So, then, the Rajah would be back some time in September, and this was the piece of information that the Dewan had acquired through the English mail.

"I am told that workmen are busy at the bungalow that stands near the big gates of the palace grounds," said the second Ranee, seizing an opportunity to assert herself mildly and put in a word.

"That is so, honourable lady," replied the Dewan.

"Does the English Government intend to live there?" asked the third Ranee.

This was a term often used in the zenana to indicate the Political Officer who represented the English Government.

"His house is the Residency," replied the Regent. "The bungalow is being prepared for the Rajah's secretary, who is coming with him."

The second Ranee turned to Sitrama, whose dignity as senior Ranee did not allow her to listen to any information not delivered first hand.

"The Dewan says, sister, that our son is bringing home a secretary, and he is to live in the bungalow by the palace gate."

"What is a secretary?" demanded the third Ranee. "Our husband never had one."

"Please, sister, ask the Dewan to tell us what a secretary is like," begged the fourth Ranee, a loving, peaceful little woman, with a childlike disposition, appealing to Sitrama.

She feared lest the lady paramount of the zenana should give them all a bad half-hour on their return to their rooms if the conversation were seriously deflected.

"Dewan Bahadur, tell us of the secretary. Is he a man?" demanded the senior Ranee.

"Gracious lady, he is a man."

"Of the English race?"

"In this case he is an Englishman."

"What will be his pay?"

"He will receive a thousand rupees from the Rajah's purse every month."

"In silver or in promises?"

"The arrangement is for silver rupees paid in full monthly."

"Pah! what folly! It is only the English Government that pays fully, and in silver," commented the senior Ranee, who never lost an opportunity of showing her contempt for that mysterious institution residing in the person of Harlesden.

"What duty will he perform?" asked the second Ranee.

"The duty of a secretary is to write letters for his employer," explained the Dewan.

"A thousand rupees a month for a letter-writer!" screamed the senior Ranee, with excitement. "What extravagance! There are letter-writers, I am told, at every corner of the street in the city. They write the

letter, address it, stamp and post it, all for the price of two annas. If our son required a man to write letters, one of these could have been selected. He would have written one letter a day regularly, which is more than any man can want, for ten rupees a month."

"It is to be hoped," added the third Ranee, feeling that it was time she took a part in the conversation again, "that the new secretary understands fully that he must find the paper, pen, ink and stamps that are used for the Rajah's letters; and they must be of the best quality to be bought in Calcutta, and not in the bazaar. Is he married? Has he any children? Will they be allowed to come and see us?"

"There are no children, for he is not married."

On hearing which the third Ranee's interest in the secretary flagged.

Rustle of silk and shuffle of feet, with chink of bracelet and bangle, informed the Dewan that the interview was over.

"You have leave to depart, Dewan Bahadur," said the senior Ranee, as she prepared to lead the way back to the zenana.

The Regent salaamed again to the unseen ladies, standing before the curtain with courteous deference. Each Ranee in order of precedence, moved away, walking slowly to her apartments. The fourth Ranee was the last to go. For a few seconds she paused by the purdah. With all her gentleness and self-effacement, she possessed the unbounded curiosity of a child that spares no pains to gain information. The curiosity was aided by a quick wit and a helpful imagination.

"Dewan Bahadur, it would rejoice my heart if I might be told the day when our noble son is expected to arrive."

He hesitated, in two minds whether he should give away the news.

"It is difficult to say."

Again the wheedling tone fell on his ear, reminding him of his youngest daughter, the apple of his eye and the object of his highest ambition.

"Will it be at the beginning or the end of the month called by the English September?"

"It will be the middle, excellent lady. There is no need to talk of it. When the time approaches nearer I myself will inform the senior Ranee."

The fourth Ranee trailed away after her sister-widows, and the humming in the hive was several degrees louder as the return of the son of the house was discussed in all its details. Great was her triumph when she announced the fact that the Rajah would return in the middle of September. It was short-lived, however. Sitrama declared positively that no one knew more than herself. Any other news was mere invention, and the fabricator deserved punishment. Here she cast a severe glance at her sister-widow, who relapsed into silence, and sought consolation in arranging the contents of an old Noah's Ark, presented to her by her late husband.

CHAPTER VII.

The town of Shivapet occupied a plain raised above the level of the sea. Its elevation saved it from the torrid heat of the low country. During the hot season a tropical sun shone with rays sufficiently tempered to make the climate acceptable to the European. In the cold weather the nights were cool enough to require a good blanket, and the mornings and evenings were crisp and refreshing.

The city, for the most part, consisted of a collection of insignificant houses closely packed. The streets were narrow and the buildings mean and irregular; but the effect was picturesque. The secret of its charm to the artistic eye was the pure, limpid atmosphere, untainted by the poisonous fumes of coal smoke. Red-tiled roofs, brown bamboo verandahs thatched with dried palm leaf, bright colour-washed walls of every conceivable tint, graceful palms, vivid green foliage of tree and creeping gourd, all were untarnished by carbonic acid gas, unsmirched by grime and smuts. The fuel used was wood; and the smoke that rose from the cooking fires spread in a pure haze of blue that enhanced rather than detracted from the scene.

Unlike an English city, the best houses were situated in the centre. The poorer classes, self-divided into colonies by their castes, clustered round the out-skirts without any undue pressing towards the residences of their prince and his nobles.

Two streets of fine proportions ran through the town in the form of a cross, and cut it into four quarters. It

was along these roads that the best houses were built. The roads were bordered by handsome avenues of trees. A stranger who did not know the plan of the town would have found it difficult to believe, standing by the gateway of the palace grounds, that he was in the very heart of a large city. The palace itself was near the cross road, its grounds stretching back over a considerable portion of the quarter in which the three blocks of buildings stood. On either side were situated the mansions of the nobles varying in size and extent. Some were as large as any one of the blocks; others were smaller and consisted of more than one house connected by closed passages. Each had its "compound," an enclosed space that served as garden, yard, and paddock, where flowers, fruit, and vegetables were grown and cows were herded. Some compounds contained fine banyan and jak trees, and groups of cocoanut palms. The foliage was as thick as if the tree had been grown in the open country; and birds made their nests high among the branches, or in the cracks and crannies of the sun-warmed brick walls of the buildings.

There was a family resemblance to the Rajah's residence in all the large houses. On the street side few windows were to be seen, and those few were jealously shuttered with wooden venetians. Verandahs had their blinds fastened down, and no sign of life was visible beyond the coming and going of an occasional servant, bearing the load of daily purchases from the bazaar.

The nobles who owned and occupied these buildings possessed houses and lands elsewhere. Far away in the depth of the country lay their paternal acres, cultivated by the ryots from generation to generation. When the crops were harvested, the owner of the estate and his family migrated to the town residence; they made the journey by easy stages in bullock coaches, followed by a string of country carts, carrying the household property.

Poor relations could always be found who were content to stay behind—when the head of the clan with his wife and children went to the city—to look after the ancestral home, and keep watch and ward over the family possessions, the cattle, sheep, goats, fowls, and garden. They were able also to report upon the ryots and inform the master that agricultural operations were not neglected.

At the point where the two principal roads of the town crossed was a group of peepul trees. Under their shade had been erected in the distant past a small temple. Many similar temples were distributed through the town. They were not used by all alike. One was appropriated by long-established custom to the weavers, another to the community of potters, another to brass-workers, another to goldsmiths. Each trade and caste—carpenters, masons, money-lenders, grain merchants, iron founders—had their own places of worship, which were supported by their offerings. The little building in the very centre of the town was not appropriated by any particular section, but was attended by all castes and trades. At stated periods, by no means frequent, a general gathering of worshippers was called together to do pujah to the demon goddess to which the building was dedicated. Even the Rajah himself attended the festival—not that he was a follower of Karlimaya or a worshipper of the demons; but because his presence was believed to bring good luck to the town in general. His nobles followed his example.

Much in the same spirit in which he went to the theatrical performances of the strolling players, the old Rajah, once in two years, came in state to the high festival of Karlimaya. Dressed for the occasion as a pujari, he duly presented an offering of some value, condescended to touch the sacrifice of blood, and stood a passive spectator of the ritual observed by the pujaris.

The collection, coming as it did from the whole town,

amounted to a large sum. The upkeep of the temple cost little, as the building was small. A few oil lamps burned continually inside, and two or three outside, upon the squat tower that surmounted the shrine. The revenue, which more than sufficed by a long way to cover every expense connected with the ritual, was used to support a large number of pujaris, and a band of dancing-girls. The girls were noted for their beauty and their skill in the Indian nautch steps and poses. Many of them belonged to the goldsmiths' and silk weavers' castes. They were brought by their parents when quite young and dedicated to the service of the temple. Their reputation was known throughout Shivapore, and they were much sought after. Besides being of good caste and proficient in their art, they had the privilege of performing before the Rajah. No social entertainment took place at the palace without a party of dasis from the temple. A special platform was erected for them in the grounds when the nautch was held in the afternoon. Here they stood, clothed in rich gold-embroidered silks and adorned with jewellery and jasmin wreaths, waiting until the Rajah should appear and take the only seat to be found before the stage. The Rajah might remain five minutes or an hour, as he pleased; but the dance, once begun, was continued until the close of the entertainment, one troupe following another without cessation. An audience was never wanting, the attraction of the nautch to the native being inexhaustible.

There was one person, however, in Shivapet whom the dasis did not please. This was the Resident. If he accepted an invitation to the palace, he gave the Dewan to understand that he did not wish to be present at a nautch. Arrangements were made, therefore, by the Dewan that dancing should take place after the English guests had departed. The Rajah, with his antiquated notions, found it hard to believe that the man existed who saw nothing to

attract him in the dasi. Not wishing, however, to disturb the placidity of the atmosphere of the palace, he fell in with the Dewan's plan, and everything went smoothly. The Englishman was gratified because he was under the impression that, as far as Shivapet was concerned, he had effectually stopped a performance that did not reflect credit on a modern Hindu prince. The Rajah was equally gratified—because the Political Agent was gratified.

In one of the largest of the private houses lived Gopaula Bahadur. He had been given several other names, which need not be mentioned here. His mansion stood next to the palace, and the grounds adjoined. Instead, however, of being separated from the road by a width of garden and shrubbery, the house was situated close to the street. It was on this account, perhaps, that the walls were almost entirely blank. Two small windows pierced the third storey. Far below was an iron-studded door, heavily bolted. A flight of masonry steps led up to the door, which had no porch nor verandah attached to it.

Gopaula, with his wife and two sons, had returned from his country estate, distant some fifty miles to the south of Shivapet. He had come into residence with the rest of the nobles to give the young Rajah a welcome, and be present at the investiture.

He was a man of advanced views. Sent to Bombay to complete his education under English professors, he imbibed from them certain western habits of thought and action that were not shaken off when he returned to Shivapore. Among others, he learned to wear his hair cut short like the Europeans, if no ceremony required the shaving of the head. He covered it with a turban, and it was not noticeable when he went out of his house. Another habit, not so easily hidden, was the adoption of the trousers, frock-coat and patent leather shoes so frequently assumed by native gentlemen of the present day. It was a becoming costume

orientalized by the turban, which lent dignity to the figure.

In the management of his household and in his manner of living he adhered to Hindu custom; he made little change in his method of taking food, in his ablutions, and in the faithful performance of his religious duties, with which eating, drinking and bathing were inextricably connected.

On one point he differed from many of his neighbours. He refused to take a second wife while his first was living. He was not altogether singular in this respect. Hindus are to be found all over India who have no desire to take a second wife, provided fate has been kind in bestowing a son. Few foreigners can understand how indispensable it is for a Hindu to have a son. His future happiness depends upon it. It is the ceremonies performed by this son after his death, by his grandson and great-grandson as well, that deliver him from the pains of the Hindu purgatory or intermediate state. With a son, the second marriage is not necessary as long as the first wife is living.

Many times had Gopaula been approached, but without success, by fathers of marriageable daughters, who hoped to persuade him to make a second union, for he was rich, and his wife was known to be a kind and gentle woman, likely to be good elder sister to the second wife. She was the mother of two sons and of Royama. The sons were married, and, though Gopaula was not yet fifty, he already had grandsons sufficient to relieve his mind of any anxiety over his future state.

The greatest divergence from Hindu custom made by Gopaula was in his treatment of his daughter. Contrary to all tradition he refused to shut her up. Not only was she permitted to break the purdah rule in Shivapet, but later she was allowed to cross the black water at the temporary sacrifice of her caste, and to continue her education

in England. It is not too much to say that his compeers were shocked, and prophecied disaster. Even if the girl herself was not ruined in character, her prospects in life were utterly blasted. Marriage with her own caste would be impossible. Gopaula refused to discuss the question, or to listen to any advice. Nor did his mind misgive him on the wisdom of his action. His thoughts were kept to himself, and his confidence in Royama's future happiness was unshaken.

His conduct had its consequences. When the late Dewan died, it was thought possible that Gopaula Bahadur, a title conferred upon him by the English Government at the recommendation of the Resident, might be chosen Dewan. Although the appointment was favoured by the English official, the Rajah was afraid to make it. He dreaded lest trouble and opposition might ensue, if Gopaula, backed by the English power, attempted to introduce any of those reforms that had already been advocated. Chakravarti, with his conservatism, appeared a more suitable candidate. He had shown no leaning towards the introduction of new methods under the title of improvements, and the Rajah anticipated no stirring up of social or political troubles under his Dewanship.

Whether Gopaula was disappointed or not, no one could say. He had his ambition, and it was joined to a consciousness of ability that was justified. He had early learned to present a smiling face to the inquisitive world, and to keep his own counsel in a land where the search after knowledge was chiefly confined to matters of a personal nature.

There was another event besides the investiture of the Rajah that occupied the thoughts of his household. This was the return of the daughter of the house. Gopaula and his wife had made ready a room in that portion set apart for the accommodation of the zenana. It was furnished in European fashion as boudoir and bedroom in one.

Adjoining was a dressing-room and bath-room, such as might have been found in any Anglo-Indian's residence.

The venetians of the window were opened and made to fasten back or close at pleasure. The window looked out upon the garden, which was like other gardens attached to the houses of natives. The trees and shrubs grew in wild confusion, the custard apple by the side of the oleander, the gourd by the rose and the jasmine; but the scene was bright, if not actually pretty, and it would have its peculiar fascination for the eye of the daughter of the house on her return, because to her it spoke of home.

In the room that contained the bed a writing-table and book-case had been introduced, also a couch and some easy chairs. Curtains hung before the window and in the open doorways. Although the walls were only colour-washed, and held no pictures, it was a chamber that would have satisfied the ordinary English girl whose tastes were not too luxurious.

Gopaula and his wife stood looking at their labour of love.

"To-morrow, to-morrow! She will be with us to-morrow!" said the mother softly, with the note of maternal affection intelligible to every ear, regardless of tongues.

"There will be much to do when she returns," replied her husband, in the superior manner of the father who would hide his fondness under cover of paternal authority.

"Her caste must be restored," remarked the mother.

"Of course. Until that is done she cannot enjoy the society of her brothers and their wives."

"Our eldest son was saying that it would be best if she became purdanasheen like her sisters-in-law."

She glanced at him with a shadow of anxiety, not quite sure of her ground. Gopaula not only possessed a strong will, but he was masterful, without being tyrannical, and hard to move when once he had come to a decision.

"That matter can be decided later on. It will depend upon herself. If I see reason for depriving her of her liberty, I shall close the door; but if she has learned how to use it, she shall go about with me as the daughters of Englishmen go about with their parents."

"A husband will have to be found for her. Is it likely that any man in Shivapet will dare to marry a woman who is not purdanasheen?" asked his wife, trying in vain to hide the uneasiness she felt.

The thought of Royama remaining unmarried was like a nightmare to the gentle lady. The subject was often discussed in the privacy of the zenana during Gopaula's absence. Her daughters-in-law declared positively that unless Royama resumed the purdah custom she would never find a husband. It was repeated so frequently that the mother was beginning to distrust the father's judgment, and believe that her sons' wives were correct.

"There will be changes under the new rule. We shall have new fashions and new opinions. Already there is an inclination to raise the age of brides, and not force them into marriage so early," said Gopaula.

"The Dewan does not share that opinion. His daughter is but eleven years old, and he is contemplating marriage for her."

"To make a marriage there must be a bridegroom as well as a bride; and the Dewan may not find it easy to carry out his design."

"It is said that he has already made choice of a husband. It is no less a person than the Rajah himself."

Gopaula was silent; not that he was in any doubt. He did not choose to discuss the matter further. Seeing the cloud of anxiety resting upon his wife's countenance, he remarked, a little later—

"We need not trouble ourselves on our daughter's account. What the gods have willed will come to pass,

and it is useless to worry. Be comforted, wife, in the thought that before long you will hold her in your arms, I hope, never more to part in this way."

* * * * *

Delphine and Royama travelled out to India together as was arranged. They shared a cabin, and, after the first day or two, settled down to the sea-voyage with comfort and enjoyment.

Ted, who had preceded them, met them on arrival, and, under his care, they continued their journey to Shivapet without any unnecessary delay. It meant a day and a night in the train. Shivapet was reached between nine and ten in the morning. During the journey Ted and his sister had little opportunity of talking, beyond the few words necessary in his concern for the comfort of the travellers.

One of the carriages belonging to the palace met them at the station. A couple of peons were deputed to look after the luggage, and Ted hurried them off to the carriage. It was a roomy, old-fashioned landau, drawn by a pair of Arabs.

The station stood outside the town, at least a couple of miles from the Rajah's residence. The ground was quickly covered by the beautiful horses, and in less than a quarter of an hour Gopaula's house was reached.

As the carriage stopped Ted jumped out. One of the syces hammered without ceremony at an insignificant door in the wall that enclosed the grounds, and shouted to announce their arrival. The front door was slowly and deliberately unbolted and opened two inches. From behind it peeped out two or three dark faces.

"Open! open!" cried Ted, not without impatience.

Royama laughed with delight and amusement.

"We never open our street doors in Shivapet more than two inches until we are assured that the visitor will be welcome. Oh, Delphine! How it all comes back to me! Am I really awake? Am I really at home again?"

"They are not giving you a very warm welcome. I think they must doubt your identity," said Delphine, laughing, as she observed that the front door was closed again.

They had not left the carriage, and were regarding operations from the window. Every chance pedestrian who was passing made it his business to inquire who were the honourable sahibs riding in the palace carriage, the scarlet and gold liveries proclaiming the ownership; and every vehicle pulled up with the same question on the lips of the occupants.

"What are all these people stopping for?" asked Delphine.

"To see who comes to my father's house."

"Is it customary to show so much curiosity?"

"It is not only customary, but is also a mark of politeness."

A string of bullock carts arrived, and every driver dismounted from his perch on the pole and advanced with the same inquiry.

"Who are the honourable ladies and gentlemen who ride in the honourable carriage belonging to his honourable Highness, the Maharajah?"

No one answered, and the curious crowd made various guesses, all wide of the mark. Again the front door was opened, this time a little wider, and Gopaula himself appeared. Delphine heard a little joyful cry from the figure by her side.

Following close behind came servants carrying two large umbrellas. These were opened, and they created a distinct impression on the crowd, who knew the reason for their use. A purdanasheen lady was about to enter. But if this was the case, why was the Englishman present? Quite a noisy discussion took place as the spectators endeavoured to solve the mystery.

Again Royama laughed delightedly as she said, "This is just like old times! What fun it is! Oh, Delphine! I am so happy! Good-bye for the present; I shall see you again soon." Then, leaning forward, she cried to Gopaula, who had descended the steps and ceremoniously greeted Ted, "Father, father! Your daughter has come home!"

"Who is it, syce?" "Has the English lady come to visit his excellency's family?" "Will the English sahib also be admitted?" "Why has the Rajah lent his carriage?" "Are these the new Arab horses bought for five thousand rupees in Calcutta?"

The queries were addressed to the coachman and syces, who remained stolid and unresponsive, a fact that created no surprise or disappointment. Amid the hurly-burly of the crowd, Royama prepared to leave the carriage. She drew her saree over her head veil-fashion until it entirely screened her face from view. Extending a hand to her father, she stepped down and went swiftly up the steps, protected from the inquisitive stare of the crowd by the umbrella bearers, who used their weapons with a dexterity born of much practice. The party passed through the doorway, and the door was immediately closed upon their heels before Royama could turn to give her companion of the voyage a farewell glance. The sound of bolts and bars being shot into their sockets was heard distinctly. As the horses started forward, Delphine looked out of the window at the house with its shutters and uninviting front door.

"What a forbidding-looking place!" she remarked.

"It's all right," replied her brother, as he settled back into the seat vacated by Royama. "The houses all look like that in the town; that is to say, if they are of any size or importance."

"I hope yours has a more cheerful appearance."

"Mine; oh, yes. It's a bungalow, and we are not

purdanasheen, you know. Here we are! How glad you will be to get in!"

The carriage swung round through an open gateway into private grounds, and pulled up under a portico.

Here no bolted door or blinded window frowned at Delphine. A raised verandah full of palms, ferns, and eucharis lilies; a couple of dignified men-servants in white followed by a smiling ayah; an impudent fox-terrier, all waggle and joyful bark; lastly, through the open doorway, a glimpse of a spotless table cloth and shining silver appointments were the objects that caught her eye. The scent of yellow roses brought back sudden memories of home, making her very silent.

When she had found her voice, her brother was hurrying off in the direction of his rooms. He turned his head to call back at her.

"Be as quick as you can, Delphine. Breakfast will be ready in twenty minutes, and I am famished."

CHAPTER VIII.

The discomforts of travel are accompanied by certain pleasures never experienced by those who remain at home. A sea-voyage has an indefinable charm for most people. To the young and healthy it is an invigorating tonic of motion. The unceasing movement of the ship day and night provides a form of exercise that requires no exertion on the part of the subject. It can be taken in the deck chair. The open-air life is a change from the confinement of walls and roofs. Inseparable with the movement is the sound of progression—the wind in the rigging, the blowing of steam, the wash of water as the ship cuts her way through; and, dominating all, the beat of the screw and rhythmical pulsing of the engines. How considerable is this chorus of sounds the traveller only discovers when it ceases.

Three or four weeks of it is enough for the individual who has not chosen the sea as a profession. In spite of the perpetual motion, the landsman is conscious on board ship that he is leading an inactive life. He longs for terrestrial stability under his feet, a less confined space, and occupation that is something more than the killing of time. The arrival in port is hailed with relief, not because the charm of the sea has gone, but because an idle existence is at an end.

From the ship the traveller passes to the train, exchanging one form of perpetual motion for another. The sound

of wind and waves is replaced by the roar of wheels upon the iron way. Blessed indeed is the calm and peace of the Indian bungalow when it is at last reached.

Delphine was thoroughly enjoying this calm and peace as she finished her toilet with the help of the ayah, who left little to be further desired in the way of a lady's-maid. At the sound of the breakfast bell she went into the dining-room where the smell of fresh coffee mingled with the scent of the roses. She seated herself before the cups at the oval table, and felt as though she were back in the breakfast-room at the Court.

"Haven't had time to look round the house yet, I suppose," said Ted, as he sat down opposite to her.

"No; if the rest of the rooms are as nice as mine, I shall feel as comfortable as I was at Dersingham."

"The Rajah has expressed a hope that you will miss none of the comforts you had there. He has furnished this house for us, and has forgotten nothing."

"How good of him to take all that trouble," said Delphine, glancing round at sideboard, dinner-wagon, and various other pieces of furniture.

"Oh! he didn't do it personally," explained Ted, whose healthy young appetite occupied his whole attention. "He told me what he wished, and left me to carry it out."

Here Peter the fox-terrier insinuated a nose under Delphine's arm as a gentle hint that he was quite ready for a chicken-bone. Ted shook his dinner-napkin at the intruder.

"Get away, Peter. You're not to be fed at table."

"The darling!" said Delphine, giving him a meaty wing-bone without any compunction as to rules. "Is he quite well?"

"Who?" asked Ted.

"The Rajah, of course. And is he happy under the new conditions?"

"One question at a time, please, or you won't give me a fair chance of eating my breakfast," responded Ted, with fraternal frankness. "I am due at the palace at half-past eleven."

He helped himself liberally from one of the dishes handed by Daniel, the butler, and sent up his cup to be refilled.

"How is he?" asked Delphine, as she poured out the coffee.

"His Highness is in excellent health."

"His Highness! Is that what you have to call him now?"

"Yes; he is a reigning prince, and, in public at least, one has to drop all familiarities."

"Then I shall have to address him as Highness also? It will seem strange and unfamiliar, and I shan't like it," said Delphine.

"You need not be always saying it. Stick it in now and then, as occasion seems to require it, just as your name is used by people who speak to you."

"Is he happy in his new position?" she asked, as she corrupted Peter still further with another bone, thereby establishing a life friendship with the guardian of the house.

"I shouldn't say that he was bursting with joy exactly. On the whole he is fairly happy, especially as he knows that it might be much worse. He takes his worries like a man."

"Worries! What can worry him?"

"The demands of State," replied Ted, promptly. "I often feel inclined to 'thank the goodness and the grace that on my birth hath smiled'; in short, that I wasn't born a rajah, with a caste to restore, with a zenana full of women to maintain, and an old fossil of a Dewan, who wants to put the clock back instead of forwards."

"I suppose you help him a good deal?"

"I suppose I do," replied Ted, a shade of doubt in his

tone. "If it means sharing his troubles, I certainly give him help."

Peter, having disposed of his second bone, sat up, hanging his fore paws in abject entreaty.

"Oh, Peter! What an insinuating beggar you are! I have no more bones for little dogs this morning," said Delphine.

"He is asking for a lump of sugar," explained Ted.

"Where did you get the dog?" asked Delphine, as she weakly ministered to Peter's demands, and gave him three lumps, excusing her indulgence on the plea that she wished to teach him to count.

"He is one of the dogs the Rajah brought out. His Highness thought that it would be nice for you to have him with you when I am away. He will keep the place clear of beggars and hawkers. They are harmless people, but the beggars are not clean in their persons; and, in a State where vaccination is not compulsory, they may be infectious."

So here was another attention on the part of the Rajah, which she was quick to appreciate.

"What are your duties, besides letter-writing?" she asked.

"They are anything but letter-writing. I have to see to all sorts of matters. Many of them the poor chap would like to look after personally, but he is unable."

"Why? What is to prevent him doing as he pleases?"

"State business, public and private. So it falls to my lot to superintend those affairs that don't belong to the State. I went up to Calcutta, for instance, and chose those horses that brought us from the station. The Ranees wanted Arabs. I am laying down a polo-ground, clearing the old race-course, and overlooking the workmen in the ballroom. They are carrying out a very effective scheme of white and gold. The Rajah ordered it. A little pink

was introduced; but he had it all out, and restricted the decorations to white and gold, which he said would show up the dresses. And he's quite right."

Delphine smiled, but said nothing. It was what she herself had suggested. Ted continued his story.

"Among other things, I've designed a new motor car for the use of the zenana. It is a kind of family omnibus, entirely closed with venetians. I found a good powerful car just imported when I was up in Calcutta about the horses, and the only alterations that had to be made were in the body. It was sent down three or four days ago, and the Ranees are delighted with it."

"What did they use before the car was bought?"

"Carriages, after the pattern of the large landau that brought us from the station. As soon as they heard of the two motors that the Rajah brought out, nothing would do but they must have one as well. We have set the fashion in cars. The Dewan has sent an order to Paris for three. He is not going to be outdone by the Rajah. They are to be painted red, picked out with black, and have polished brass fittings."

"They will look like post-office vans."

"That won't matter to the Dewan. He's a funny old man. In spite of his rank conservatism he doesn't want to be left behind. During his regency he has built himself another house in Shivapet, so he has two town houses to the Rajah's one. In addition he has his country house, some seventy miles away, where he will retire when we go to the hills in the hot weather."

"Tell me about the English people here," said Delphine, who was not interested in the doings of the Dewan.

"First, I would mention the Constables, because Mrs. Constable is going to chaperone you. He is the Residency surgeon, and he also attends the Rajah and his household. He is as pleasant a man as ever stepped, but occasionally

he is apt to be peppery. I don't wonder at it. I shall be as bad myself one day. His wife is one of the best women in the world, and you will like her. They live in a bungalow on the opposite side of the road. I believe she is going to call on you this very day. She wants to be the first to give you a welcome."

"How nice of her! And Mr. Harlesden; where does he live?"

"At the Residency, which is on the other side of the railway station, five miles away."

"Rather far off," remarked Delphine, who had had no experience of India's 'magnificent distances.'"

"With all the horses and carriages and motor cars available, the distance is nothing. It is a pretty drive along a shady road. Harlesden is very pleased with the way things are going in Shivapore under the new rule. He doesn't have to worry about detail, so he can afford to be pleased."

"What improvements have been taken in hand?"

"Waterworks, the installation of electricity and gas, municipal reforms in the matter of sanitation. The water supply will soon be laid on."

"They have been very quick about it."

"Harlesden is not letting the grass grow under his feet. The water scheme was begun before we arrived. The reservoirs were made, and the works are nearly finished."

"How was it hustled on without the Rajah?"

"It appears that the man who acted for Harlesden took up the question. In spite of the Dewan's opposition, he obtained the sanction of the English Government. There was a bad outbreak of cholera in Shivapet last summer, and that helped. Dr. Constable was also a strong ally. Nothing was said to Harlesden or the Rajah. The acting Political Agent simply put himself into it and somehow got it passed by the Council. When we arrived, six weeks ago, the

waterworks, as well as the new gas plant were not far off completion."

"No wonder Mr. Harlesden is pleased," said Delphine, as she rose from the breakfast-table.

Ted suggested a move to the verandah, where some cane easy chairs were placed. He had time for a cigarette before going to the palace.

"I suppose you walk over?" said Delphine, as she sank into a comfortable seat.

"Sometimes the Rajah sends a carriage for me; that is, if he is in a hurry. I prefer walking, as I want the exercise. I ride with him in the afternoon, but it isn't enough to keep me fit. By-the-bye, he has bought a horse that will carry you. I hope you brought out your saddle and habit?"

"Of course I did. No, Peter, I won't have you on my lap. You're much too friendly and familiar."

"After I am gone," said Ted, between the puffs of smoke, "you must look round the house. Go and see my rooms. They are just as comfortable as yours. The Rajah is very good. He spares no expense to make us happy."

"I hope he is equally happy himself."

"When he can enjoy his own company and mine he is; but when his four mothers are pestering him——"

"Four mothers! How absurd you are, Ted!"

"It's true; I'm not joking. His father left four widows, and they all claim to be his step-mothers, omitting the 'step.'"

"It is better than having four mothers-in-law. Do you think that the Ranees will call upon me?"

"Rather not! They're purdanasheen. You will go and see them, I dare say. Mrs. Constable will take you."

"I shall enjoy it. I am very curious to see the inside

of a zenana. What a shame it is to shut women up and destroy their influence in the world!"

Ted burst into a fit of laughter, and the verandah roof echoed with his shouts.

"Influence, indeed! We've felt their influence ever since we arrived. There's no getting away from it. They have their spies all over the place. One may be hiding at this very moment among those pots below the balustrade of the verandah. I wish to goodness we could curtail their influence and protect ourselves from their prying. I should like to turn the whole lot loose, with leave to satisfy their curiosity personally instead of sending for me."

"For you!"

"Well, they send for the Rajah; but he always asks me to go. It's one of my duties, as far as I can make out, to interview his quadruple mother for him, and answer all the questions suggested to their inquisitive minds by the information gathered by their spies. Such preposterous tales as are carried, too!"

"You have to interview them through that curtain the Rajah told us of."

"Yes; I sit on one side of the purdah and the women on the other. An ancient dame, a cross between a poor relation and a head-nurse, sits on my side of the curtain and translates. Already I've picked up some of the language. I'm having a munshi; but I learn more from hearing them gabble. The senior Ranee usually leads the conversation—and she has a voice like the whistle of a steam-tug. When she stops the others all chatter at once, until she is tired of their noise. Then she shuts them up, and begins again herself."

"What sort of questions do they ask you?"

"The most idiotic you ever heard. Three mornings ago I was very busy with the Rajah over the plan of the new theatre he wants to build, when they sent post haste

for me. It was a most urgent matter, we were told, and I must come at once. What do you think they wanted to know ? "

" What ? "

" How many hours the Rajah slept in the day ! "

" I shouldn't obey the summons if it was for such a trivial reason."

" Yes, you would—out of pity for Narayan. If I don't go they bombard him with messages, imploring him to have compassion on his poor mothers, and allow them a sight of his divine god-like person, whom they love more than all things on earth. And so it ends in—— "

A wild scream interrupted his speech and rendered him dumb. Delphine was startled to such an extent that she bounded out of her chair, prepared to take refuge in the house. Peter awoke from dreams of chicken bones and sugar, and went into canine hysterics from a safe position between Ted's legs.

An old woman with her hair dishevelled and tumbling about her face, her saree torn and covered with dust, crawled up the verandah steps and threw herself before Ted, causing Peter to retreat with fierce growls under the chair. The screams merged into heart-rending groans.

" Great Scott, woman ! What has happened ? " cried Ted, who also had sprung to his feet in his surprise.

" He is dead !—the young man ! And there is nothing left of him but his turban, which was lying on the ground before he went. Yemmah ! yemmah ! yemmah ! "

" Who is dead ? "

" He leaves a widow, a poor woman with five small children, to lie beneath your pious footsteps, sahib ! Aiyoh ! yemmah ! yemmah ! aiyoh ! "

" Who leaves a widow ? " demanded Ted.

" It has happened as we said. The driver killed no

cock and made no sacrifice when the new carriage came to the palace, therefore has this misfortune happened."

She concluded with a chorus of "yemmahs!" and "aiyohs!" longer than ever.

"Is the man who drives the new horseless carriage hurt?"

"I cannot tell, sahib; he is no longer there."

"Run away, probably, after damaging the new car, with some piece of folly."

As the old woman remained silent except for her groans, he asked—

"Has he run away?"

"No, sahib; he did not run. He was carried away by the will of the gods without requiring the aid of legs. Only his widow and orphans are there waiting to throw themselves before your pious——"

"I must be off, Delphine. She is the old grannie interpreter of the zenana. The kettle has boiled over, and I must go and pull the fat out of the fire, as usual. It's an accident of some sort. Don't be alarmed. This is the ordinary method in this country of communicating bad news."

"She looks as if she had been hurt," said Delphine, from her position in the doorway.

"She has only been putting dust on her head and 'rending her garments' as a sign that she is respectfully sympathetic."

He threw away the end of his cigarette, put on his sun-topee, and prepared to depart. He glanced at his watch.

"Half-past eleven. I ought to be with the Rajah. However, I must go and see what has happened, otherwise we shall receive a string of urgent messages whilst he is giving me an audience."

The old woman, observing preparations for a move on

the part of the sahib, concluded that she had succeeded in her mission, and refrained from further expression of extravagant grief. She rose to her feet, shook the dust out of her saree, and smoothed its folds. Then she laid one hand over the other and made the best use of her eyes in taking in every detail of dress and features of the lovely lady who had appeared so suddenly at the bungalow.

"Go along, old mother. Tell the Ranees I'm coming," said Ted.

"I will follow your worship," replied the dame sidling towards the part of the bungalow where the servants were to be found.

Ted detected her manœuvre, and stood firm.

"No, you don't! No gossiping here. Off you go to the zenana, straight."

Very much against her will she found herself compelled to walk ahead of the sahib as he made his way across the compound to the palace.

Delphine watched him go with a smile of amusement.

"Ted, of all people! At the beck and call of four Ranees! How truly absurd! Poor old Ted!"

CHAPTER IX.

On Ted's departure from the bungalow Delphine retired within to look round at the home which had been prepared for her. Her own rooms erred, if anything, on the side of lavishness. No money had been spared, and, in addition to the luxury of it all, there was evidence of careful thought for her personal tastes. It was more than a brother would have done. Ted might have written the order for the tradesmen, and have filled in and despatched the cheque when it was signed that paid the bill; but the choice was not Ted's; the mind that thought out and arranged everything was the Rajah's.

She went back to her dressing-room, where she found the ayah busy unpacking and putting away the contents of her trunks. She saw no cause to interfere. With a word of approval, and one or two directions, she passed on into the boudoir. Here, again, was evidence of ease and luxury without counting the cost. Thence she proceeded to the drawing-room.

In the doorway she stopped. An exclamation of surprise and wonder came from her lips as her eyes travelled over the scene. The room was barely half the size of the drawing-room at Dersingham Court; but, somehow, it recalled her old home in every detail of its fittings and furniture. There was the writing-table where she wrote notes for her mother. The doulton vase might have been the identical bit of pottery that always stood upon her table at the Court. The yellow tea-roses it contained might equally

have been plucked from the old timbered walls of the house. A group of easy chairs near the table was a replica of the group that was arranged before one of the mullioned windows. Here the wide glazed doors opening into the verandah took the place of the bay. A tea-table familiar in shape and size was ready for afternoon tea. Even the pattern of the curtains recalled the curtains of her home. She was more than a little moved, not only from pleasure in such a perfectly appointed house, but also at the kindness that lay behind it all. Nothing was forgotten—piano, pictures, occasional tables, ornaments, even the fireplace, or what might have been taken for the fireplace, with its summer dress of mirror and ferns, all were there, posed with a settled, finished hand, as though they had occupied their positions for many years.

Hardly knowing whether to laugh or cry, so vivid the semblance, so far away the real home, she sank into a chair, the counterpart of a favourite seat at home, and leaned back with a sense of luxurious delight. The air blew in at the open door, soft, but not over-heated, although the sun blazed with midday fervour. The bungalow was shaded by deep verandahs, that modified the glare without excluding the breeze. A bird sang a song outside that was strange in her ears, its nest hidden in the oleander growing by the carriage-drive. From where she sat she could see the garden with its wealth of colour and luxuriant foliage. Trim and neat, its profuse growth was regulated by an unsparing pruning-knife, handled by a skilled gardener. Roses growing in large pots abounded out in the open. Under the shade of the house, tuberose and eucharis lilies, maidenhair fern, crotons, and other foliage plants common to a tropical garden flourished. Strong-winged butterflies of unfamiliar form and brilliancy rose from scented blossom and soared like birds into the dark glossy foliage of banyan and jak tree.

She caught a gleam of water in the distance through the trees, and here and there she could distinguish the outline of a massive block of buildings, too imposing in size to be a private dwelling. It must be the palace of the Rajah, and the water was the lake where the red lotus lilies grew that Narayan had told her of.

Peter disappeared in the direction of the back verandah in search of more bones, and she was alone. The somnolent peace of the Indian bungalow crept over her, and no sound but the bird's song reached her ear. She did not hear an electric motor car glide up the laterite carriage-drive and stop beneath the portico.

Daniel, watchful and attentive, went forward with a low salaam. The Rajah checked his advance with a motion of the hand, and the butler slipped round by the inner door to warn his mistress.

"His Highness, missie sahib. He enters by the verandah."

With the consciousness of inferior caste and birth, Daniel effaced himself, wondering much that his English mistress should be so honoured.

Delphine rose as the Prince entered.

"Rajah! Rajah!" she cried in a glad voice that quickened his pulse. "I *am* pleased to see you! This is splendid, meeting you again!"

She clasped his hand in her fervent, impulsive manner, her eyes fully endorsing her words.

"Welcome, Miss Dersingham. Welcome to Shivapet!"

"You have, indeed, given me a welcome. Look! this is your doing. Ted would never have dreamed of it. How good you are, Rajah! Who but you would ever have thought of preparing such a perfect memory of the old Court? Sit down; do sit down. Here is your favourite chair. It may not be the original, but it is to all appearance the same."

He listened, fascinated with the English speech, his mind leaping back into the past, when he followed his inclinations without one thought of the opinion of others.

"I am glad you like it," he said quietly.

"What made you think of such a happy surprise for me?" she asked.

"It was all selfishness, pure selfishness."

"Nonsense, Rajah! You are the most unselfish man that ever lived!"

How refreshing it was to hear himself talked to in this fashion once more! She had forgotten what Ted had told her of the necessity of addressing him as Highness. The old term was on her lips with the frequency of friendly affection. She contradicted him royally. Already he was sick of the adulation and the servile acquiescence he met with whenever he spoke to any of his subjects. Even Ted had found it expedient to use the ceremonious term. It often happened that the Dewan or some member of the Council was present when he and the Rajah were together. The use of the less honourable mode of address on the part of the secretary would have been unseemly. The name "Narayan" had dropped out altogether, and Rajah was heard only in strict privacy.

"It pleases you to say so; but I shall tell you the truth—the blunt, naked truth, so dear to the heart of your nation, so seldom met with in this land of crafty speech?"

"Don't your people speak the truth?"

"The Anglo-Indians have a saying in the broken English of their native servants which is correct, 'What master wishing, that only I saying.' I get more of that kind of thing than I want."

"You shall have the truth from me, Rajah."

"Thank you," he replied, his eyes resting on her figure.

It was like gazing at a bunch of fresh cool violets

after having been dazzled by the scarlet of the scentless hybiscus.

"You must promise to play fair," she said.

"I promise; and, to show you I mean it, I will tell you why I designed this room to look like the Court."

"To please me, of course."

They laughed as schoolboy and girl might have done at their own little personalities, and the old spell of her comradeship was revived.

"That came in—afterwards. I love the Court almost as much as you do. Your presence and your brother's would, I knew, bring it back vividly. It crossed my mind that the picture would be more complete if the figures were placed in a copy of the old setting, where I first knew them. So, you see, I expect to have as much pleasure out of it as you, Miss Dersingham."

The voice was the same, and there was not much difference in the manner. They were chatting together as they had done times out of number when he had arrived on one of his frequent visits to the Court. Yet there was a growing conviction in her mind that some subtle change had come over him. She had not seen him before in a turban. It was a simple, close-fitting head-dress of white and gold ornamented by a diamond clasp set with a large stone of great value. From the ornament rose a small aigrette indicating his royalty. The turban was becoming, and added dignity to his appearance. A second change was the absence of the small black moustache which he had worn in England—a sacrifice required of him in the performance of the funeral rites. The short hair covering his head had also disappeared, from the same cause, but the shaven head was amply hidden by the turban.

"I hope you will often find time to come and look at the picture you have planned. No doubt you are busy; but

that is nothing unusual. I remember that you were always occupied when you were in England."

"There I was busy over my own pleasures. Here I am fully employed for quite another reason."

"What is that?"

"The demands of State," he replied, with a faint echo of a sigh.

Again she looked at him, puzzled as the indefinable sense of a change came over her.

"They don't run in harness with pleasure."

"No, indeed, they don't," he replied, with more animation than he had hitherto shown.

"Tell me what some of them are?"

"They won't interest you, I am afraid," he answered, lapsing into a listlessness that was not a trait he had shown in the past.

"Oh! but they will! I am very much interested in every thing that concerns yourself."

It was said with easy grace and an entire absence of intentional flattery. He did not mistake her meaning, or infer more than she intended by words that might have been construed differently.

"I wish I could be interested in them myself."

"Perhaps you will be when you know that Ted and I are looking on and sympathizing with you in your troubles. Am I to be allowed to see any of the ceremonies connected with your—what am I to call it?—crowning, isn't it?"

"Induction to the throne. There is a semi-religious function coming off before long, at which all the English as well as the native gentlemen will be present. It is called a durbar, but it is not exactly that."

"And I may come too?"

"If you wish."

He did not speak with any enthusiasm. Secretly he would have been better pleased if she had decided to keep

away. His diffidence troubled her. It was so unlike the energetic man she had known who could do nothing without a superabundance of enthusiasm. What had happened to him? Why had he slipped away from the old footing? She did him the justice not to put it down to pride and the accession to his new dignities.

Something of the same kind was passing through his mind, but with a difference. He was in no doubt as to its origin. She was unaltered. The same frank speech, the same turn of the head, the same straight glance of friendship from the violet-coloured eyes were all there, with other familiar mannerisms treasured within his memory. Yes; her life had been unaltered since they had last met. But what of his? Could she but know all that he had gone through, all that had passed since he had set foot upon his native land, would the speech be as frank, the glance as straight, the hand of friendship as freely given?

For several hideous days after his arrival he had been occupied with ceremonies for the restoration of his caste. The purohits, acting as private religious ministers, prescribed the rites and superintended their performance. He was entirely in their hands. The ceremonies proved tedious, and some of them degrading to a man of his education and refinement.

They were followed by the shraddah rites, performed for the repose of the spirits of the dead man and his ancestors. Narayan retained his Hindu faith, and believed that the rites were necessary; but there were moments when he wished that they were of a less superstitious, less childish nature; when he felt that he was losing his dignity and self-respect in carrying them out.

He performed ceremonies with water, with fire, with boiled rice, oiled butter, sugar and camphor; he repeated muntrums—verses from the sacred books; and he fed

Brahman beggars, men of great sanctity in Hindu eyes, but unrefined and ignorant of the very rudiments of civilized manners.

What would she have thought could she have seen him solemnly making balls of rice to represent his defunct ancestors and casting them into a tank so that the spirits of his forebears might be invested with ethereal bodies, and pass into the presence of Yama, god of death, to receive judgment, the doom of rebirth, or absorption into the Heaven of Brahma ?

Looked at from the Hindu point of view, it was all natural, important, inevitable. Regarded with European eyes, it savoured strongly of half-civilized superstition.

This was the shadow that had risen between them, known to him in its entirety ; unknown to her, but nevertheless felt instinctively.

" Yes ; I should like to be present," she said, after a short silence. " I should like to see you vested with your dignities as a ruling prince, for it is an honour that will sit well upon you. It seems to me that the occasion ought to be full of interest to all who wish you well."

He wondered if she would find it all that she anticipated, and his mind misgave him as he recalled the strange ways of the purohits.

" You will not understand the meaning of the ceremonies that are performed, and they will appear senseless," he said.

" It will not matter. I want to be the first to congratulate you after they are over. It will be like a court at home, I suppose ? "

" Not exactly," he replied. " In this first durbar you will be only a spectator. I am not permitted to speak to any one, and only the purohits will address me. Later on, another durbar will be held of the nature of a levee or

reception. I hope you will be there, and that you will then be the first to give me your congratulations."

A sound of footsteps in the verandah heralded the approach of Ted. He entered, heated and out of breath.

"I'm late, Highness. I hope I haven't kept you waiting and inconvenienced you."

"Not at all, Dersingham. I have had an opportunity of talking to your sister. What have you been about?"

"It's the new car for the Ranees."

"What's the matter with it?"

"Blown to smithereens! Eight thousand rupees gone at one fell swoop, worse luck!"

"How did it happen?" asked Delphine.

"The chauffeur tried to inspect the inside of the petrol tank with a box of matches."

"Poor fellow! I'm afraid he came off badly," remarked the Rajah.

"He's dead; and the car is simply ruined."

"The Ranees won't like it," said the Rajah, smiling, in spite of his concern.

"That's where most of the trouble comes in. They are just raging. They have sent for your Highness to go and see them at once."

"Ah! Miss Dersingham! I don't keep a dog and bark myself," said the Rajah, with a humorous glance at his secretary.

"No, Delphine. He is afraid, and he sends me to bear the brunt of the storm," rejoined Ted, ruefully. "This time it is going to be one of the worst we have yet had in the zenana."

Delphine looked at him with amusement.

"It won't hurt you, Ted. You can seek shelter from your cyclone in the bungalow. The ladies are purdanasheen, and can't pursue you here."

"No; they can't. Good old purdah! It comes in useful sometimes, and is my salvation when the Ranees are displeased."

"Of course, they want a new car," said the Rajah.

"If that was all we could easily manage it, provided that your Highness consented to pay the bill. They are clamouring for the instant punishment of the poor fellow who is dead. They demand that the whole family, down to the third cousin shall be severely dealt with. The method of punishment is to be left to their choice, and I believe it is to be something particularly vicious and nasty."

"You may promise them anything you like to pacify them—always adding that I will see justice done," said the Rajah.

"Justice from your point of view will not tally with theirs," remarked Ted. "The zenana is too well informed of the doings in the outer world for us to hope to deceive the ladies into thinking that you have carried out their bloodthirsty wishes when you have compensated the widow and paid for a funeral feast."

"Promise them a new and still more magnificent car, and that will, perhaps, reconcile them to the modern course of justice," said the Rajah, as he rose from his chair and held out his hand to Delphine. "Good-bye, Miss Dersingham. I must go back to the palace, much as I should like to remain here. There is so much I want to talk about. You left London six weeks later than I did."

"Come to tea, Rajah, some day soon," she said warmly, as she placed her hand in his.

"Thanks," he replied, after a moment's hesitation.

"When you are not so busy, perhaps," she added, noting the hesitation, and ascribing it to pressure of business.

"Yes," he acquiesced, but with a reluctance that puzzled her, and she wondered if it was due to position.

In another minute he was gone, carrying Ted away with him to the vicarious duties of the palace, supposed to belong to the office of private secretary.

CHAPTER X.

Calls are made between the hours of twelve and two in India. The Rajah was a little early; but, before he left the bungalow, the guard at the palace gate had struck the midday gong in the courtyard. Upon the departure of her visitor, Delphine seated herself at the writing-table with the intention of beginning a letter to her mother. She dated and addressed the sheet of note-paper, "The Palace Bungalow, Shivapet, Shivapore, India."

"The Palace Bungalow!" It roused a train of thought stretching from the past into the future. Only a few weeks ago Narayan was their guest at Dersingham, the best of friends, the most congenial of companions, whether in the saddle or on the golf links or round the billiard-table. What was this indefinable change, this shadow of reserve that had sprung up to quench the old buoyancy of spirit?

Was the change in him or in herself?

He had given unmistakeable proof that his regard for her was in no way lessened. The preparations seemed rather to indicate that it had, if anything, increased. Not only had he forestalled every reasonable wish that she might have, but he had come to greet her at the very earliest opportunity without even waiting for the conventional hour when visitors might send in their cards. It was impossible to conceive that he had altered in his friendship.

Did the fault lie with her? Had she been influenced unconsciously by his accession to new honours? This

could not be the case. Far from being affected by the knowledge, she had actually forgotten, for the time being, that he was a reigning prince. She thought only of him as an old friend of the same class as herself. Not once had the new honorific, adopted by Ted, been used in speaking to him. The cloud that had arisen was perplexing, and, in the absence of any reason for its existence, she tried to persuade herself that it was a creation of her own fancy. This theory she was unable to maintain as she recalled all that had passed. There was nothing tangible that she could lay hold of; but, for all that, the obstacle was felt in the unusual reserve of his manner and in the absence of that frank speech with which she was familiar. In reviewing the conversation she became more and more convinced that his words were often carefully chosen, and that spontaneity was lacking in nearly all that he said.

Although she had to give up the solution of the mystery for the present, being of a practical mind, she resolved that this new condition must not be allowed to continue. The old equality should be preserved in private, whatever their attitude towards each other might be in public. The friendship—begun in the days when he was a boy at Eton and she a schoolgirl—was too precious to be allowed to slip without an effort to retain it. Through all the years of their youth it had never been so much as strained. Was it to be broken now for a cause she could not fathom?

As she sat there in the ideal Indian home he had prepared, she determined again and again, that neither State duties nor the obligations of royalty should come between them. The gulf, if gulf there were, should be bridged. Impulsive to a fault, she decided to act without delay. At the very first opportunity she would overthrow the barrier between them and recover lost ground.

She was in no doubt as to whether he wished to keep her friendship. A hundred little incidents reassured her

on that point. Yes; it remained for her to restore matters to their original footing.

Her reverie was disturbed by the arrival of another visitor. As the hooded carriage belonging to Mrs. Constable, the wife of the Residency and Palace surgeon, drew up under the portico, Daniel ran forward. He was no longer a cringing subject in the presence of his sovereign, but a well-trained butler, secure of the appreciation of his employers. Mrs. Constable had known him for some years, and it was through her good offices that he had been engaged by Ted as head servant. He met her as she descended from the victoria.

"The miss sahib has come, lady," he said, in English.

"Everything was ready, I hope?"

"Yes, ma'am. She is very pleased, and His Highness the Rajah is also pleased."

Mrs. Constable gave him a sharp glance.

"Did His Highness say so?"

"His Honourable Highness himself came to see, and there was approval as he looked round."

"When did he come? Before the missie sahib arrived?"

"No, ma'am; after breakfast. His Highness has only just now gone back to the palace with the master."

"H'm," sniffed Mrs. Constable, as she mounted the verandah steps. "Go and tell your mistress that I am here, and give her my card."

Following close upon the announcement of her arrival, Mrs. Constable entered the drawing-room. Delphine rose from her seat at the writing-table, leaving her unwritten letter lying on the blotter. The elder lady made no stranger of her. She kissed her without ceremony on the strength of their old acquaintance.

"So, my dear, you have arrived at Shivapet. Yes; you have grown very like your mother as I remember her.

I was a girl then—just engaged. She was a happy young wife. I recollect how impressed I was with her appearance as matron. I wondered if I should have the luck to be as happy as she was."

"I am sure of it!" rejoined Delphine, who had been touched by her motherly reception. "You are much happier now, for poor mother is a widow, and she has had to leave her old home."

"I know; I heard all about it from her." Mrs. Constable nodded her head as if to intimate that in this respect Delphine could tell her nothing new. "Now she has written again and put you in my charge. A brother is not always sufficient chaperone. When he fails I am to fill in the gap. I suppose you have not seen anything of Shivapet at present?"

"Nothing but what the drive from the station could show me. I only arrived this morning."

"To be sure; and I am your first visitor to welcome you to your Indian home."

"I have met the Rajah."

"At the railway station?"

"No; here. He came this morning."

"Looking for Ted, I presume?"

"He said he came to call upon me."

"Was your brother in?"

It was as well that Ted had mentioned that Mrs. Constable was a kindly disposed woman, or Delphine might have resented this cross-examination. As it was, she replied simply and without a suspicion that anything might lie behind it—

"Not when the Rajah arrived. Ted was called to the Palace directly after breakfast. An accident had happened to the Ranees' motor car, and he was obliged to go and pour oil on troubled waters—assure them of a new one as soon as it could be brought down from Calcutta; and promise

that the chauffeur, who caused the accident, should get his deserts. Poor fellow! He was killed."

"How did it happen?"

"Something foolish with a box of matches. The Ranees are so angry at the destruction of the car that they want the Rajah to punish the poor man's family."

"Just like them. Silly old owls! That is between ourselves, of course. My husband loses patience with them altogether; but we have to keep up an appearance of being pleased."

"Dr. Constable has a good deal to do with the zenana, of course. Do they send for him often?"

"Nearly every day. It is the senior Ranee who gives so much trouble. She is a masterful woman, and she would like to have the Rajah under her thumb. We shall see whether she succeeds or not."

"He is too strong to come under the zenana rule," said Delphine.

She spoke with confidence, as one who entertained no sort of doubt as to the correctness of her statement. Mrs. Constable shot a keen glance at her.

"You know him well, apparently; but you have yet to fathom the influence of the women of the palace. My good man is short in the temper and long in the head, yet they over-reach him sometimes on his own ground, too."

"How do they manage it?"

"It's all that curtain business. If he could see them face to face, he would soon find out their trickery."

"What kind of tricks do they play him?" asked Delphine, rather glad to turn the conversation away from herself.

Mrs. Constable was quite ready with her tales, and Delphine remembered what the Rajah had told her.

"It was only three weeks ago that the Ranees sent an

urgent message asking him to come at once and prescribe for a newly-born creature in the zenana that was in rather a bad way. He went off at once, much puzzled, as he hadn't heard that a confinement was imminent. The Ranees all came down to the purdah room in a state of excitement to hear what he had to say. He put a lot of questions, and thought the symptoms sounded odd. Then he asked for the baby to be brought down. They fetched it, and he passed his clinical thermometer through the slip in the curtain and told them to take its temperature. Whilst waiting for it he heard a loud 'ba—a!' 'What's that?' he asked. 'The mother of the poor sick baby!' was the reply. He had been called in to prescribe for a recently born kid; the old nanny, its mother, being a favourite with one of the Ranees."

Delphine laughed, and Mrs. Constable joined in. It was evident that she enjoyed the tale of her husband's discomfiture as much as anybody.

"Wasn't Dr. Constable angry?" asked Delphine.

"Furious; but what's the good of losing your temper with a parcel of silly women whom you have never seen? He always goes to sleep in the afternoon between lunch and tea, and when he wakes up he has forgotten all the morning worries. That reminds me to tell you, Delphine, that you must make a point of lying down every afternoon for an hour. Then you dress for tea and the evening drive. It's quite chilly after sundown, so you must never go out without your wraps."

"Are we the only ladies in Shivapet?"

"No; there's the police commissioner's wife, Mrs. Wythall—a nice woman, often out in camp with her husband; and one or two other English officials; a man connected with the mines, who looks after the interests of Government, with one or two Europeans under him. Then there is Mr. Harlesden."

"I know him very well. He was at Dersingham only a short time before I left."

Mrs. Constable glanced at her again, as though a sudden possibility had presented itself to her mind in connection with the Resident.

"He is one of the best men that ever stepped. He is sure to come and call before long, and he will send you an invitation to a large reception he is giving as soon as the Rajah has completed the necessary ceremonies for the restoration of his caste and the repose of his father's spirit. You know that the Rajah is obliged to go through them, being an orthodox Hindu."

Delphine had a vague idea that some ceremonies would be necessary, but she supposed that they would be in connection with the investiture.

"The Rajah said nothing about them himself?"

"Not a word; he very rarely talked about himself."

"You saw a good deal of him, didn't you?"

"He was often at our house. He and Ted were great friends."

The use of the past tense slipped out unconsciously. It caught Mrs. Constable's ear, and she replied—

"They still are friends as far as is possible. The Rajah is lucky to get a man like your brother as his secretary."

As she talked her eyes took in every detail of the room in which they sat. Through the open door she had a glimpse of the dining-room; and by turning round in her chair she could see into the boudoir.

"What a pretty house your brother has made of this! I remember it a ramshackle neglected place six months ago. I didn't think it was habitable or could be repaired. He has lost no time in getting things ship-shape."

"Ted has only finished it off," explained Delphine. "The repairs and the furnishing and the making of the

garden were all begun some time ago by order of the Rajah before he left England."

"Did he choose this furniture?" asked Mrs. Constable, with increased interest, as she again looked round.

"Yes; and do you know that most of it duplicates the furniture in our drawing-room at home. Isn't it charming of the Rajah?"

Mrs. Constable did not reply. She rose from her chair and walked out into the verandah, from which point of vantage she examined the sunlit garden. "H'm," was her comment, made to herself. To Delphine, she said—

"No expense spared, I see. You have three or four hundred rupees' worth of roses out there. Flowers in India, as in England, cost money to grow. Who's that? Is she a servant?" she asked abruptly, pointing to a native girl, who shrank back among the pot-plants and tried to hide behind an oleander bush.

Delphine had followed her when she moved and stood by her side. She looked at the girl, but, naturally, was unable to recognize her.

"I know none of my servants but Daniel and the ayah. I don't think she's the ayah."

"She is certainly not your ayah, whom I engaged myself at your brother's request."

Mrs. Constable returned to the drawing-room in business-like fashion, and called for Daniel, who came at once.

"Go and see who that is hiding among the oleanders just beyond the verandah," she commanded, in the Anglo-Indian tone that he knew and understood.

It meant the definite authority that absolved the inferior of all responsibility, and enabled him to assume more power than he really possessed. Daniel ran out, and they heard his voice raised in angry inquiry. The intruder was sent about her business with small ceremony. He returned more important than ever.

"Some one with a message from the Ranees for the master," he explained. "I told her that the master was at the palace with His Highness, and I gave order to go."

"H'm!" was Mrs. Constable's comment. "A spy already from the zenana. Daniel!" The name was shot at him, and he stood attentive and alert. "That woman was sent to watch your mistress. It won't do. You must tell the gardeners that they must keep the compound clear of all strangers, or your master will fine them. Where's Peter, the dog?"

"In the back verandah, taking his food."

"Greedy little pig! Keep him in front, and don't beat him if he barks at strangers. Here, Peter! Peter! Peter!"

The dog came running to her, and greeted her affectionately.

"This is your place, Peter. Good dog! Take care of your mistress and clear the place of spies—if you can."

"Do you really believe that the Ranees send out spies?" asked Delphine, who found it difficult to entertain the suspicions that troubled her visitor.

"Undoubtedly they do. The poor ladies are eaten up with curiosity about the daily occurrences outside their own walls. It is not to be wondered at when one remembers that they can only get in touch with the outside world in a secondhand fashion—either through the gossip brought by their servants or through the curtain in the purdah room."

She seated herself again, this time taking the chair the Rajah had sat in; one that seemed to Delphine as though it was already dedicated to his exclusive use. Mrs. Constable did not require any comment from her listener, but continued—

"I must tell you a story about my husband and that curtain. I daresay that your brother has described it to you——"

"The Rajah has described it."

"Oh! the Rajah! H'm! He's on the other side of it when he interviews his mothers, so he can afford to laugh."

Mrs. Constable's thoughts seemed to have wandered, for she was silent. Delphine brought her back to the subject by saying—

"Do tell me what happened to the doctor. It wasn't another sick kid, was it?"

"No; it was the senior Ranee herself. Some months ago there was an epidemic of German measles in the town. The zenana was not exempt, and the senior Ranee, having eaten too much melon, felt ill and thought she had caught the complaint. Dr. Constable was sent for post-haste. She is always on her dignity, and she was not at all pleased at having to undergo the same treatment as other patients. When the doctor asked to feel her pulse, she ordered one of her attendants to present her arm at the little opening in the purdah. The girl happened to have the disease herself, so her quickened pulse and feverish skin satisfied him that his patient had measles right enough. He next demanded to see her tongue. Another attendant was ordered to present her tongue at the opening. She was young and in excellent health, and her tongue was as clean and as red as one could desire. The doctor began to feel puzzled. He directed the women to take the Ranee's temperature by placing the thermometer under her arm. An old woman was called up to undergo this process, and her temperature was naturally, if anything, below the standard. Then the doctor began to suspect that there had been hanky-panky somewhere, and he asked the woman who interpreted how many people had answered for the Ranee. She replied, 'Three, sahib; and there are three more ready if your honour would like to continue the experiments.'"

After another ten minutes' chat, during which time

Delphine answered as many questions, Mrs. Constable rose to go.

"Will you come for a drive with me this afternoon, after tea?" she asked. "There are some pretty roads round Shivapet, and most of them are avenued with beautiful trees."

"Thank you; I am afraid I must say no. I have promised to go for a ride after tea."

"With whom?"

"Ted and the Rajah."

"Has Ted got a horse for you?"

"Yes; that is to say, there is one in the Rajah's stable that I may have the use of whenever I wish to ride."

"Never carried a lady, I'll be bound," said the outspoken dame. "I hope you are a good horsewoman?"

"The animal I am to ride is a good lady's hack. It was recently bought by the Rajah on purpose for me to ride."

"H'm!" was all Mrs. Constable could ejaculate for the moment.

Her breath was taken away by Delphine's unconscious assurance. Her keen eye searched the girl's face for sign of self-consciousness, but she could detect nothing of the kind. She went into the verandah towards the portico where her carriage waited. Here she obtained another view of the garden.

She stopped and called Daniel.

"Who is that man in the white coat over there?" she asked, pointing to an individual partly screened by a pot of flaming poinsettia.

The butler hastened to inquire, and returned with the information that it was one of the gardeners from the palace.

"Gardener, indeed! Do gardeners wear white coats? Tell him to be off back to the palace. The missie sahib will

make complaint to the Rajah if the palace people are seen in this compound."

As she shook hands with Delphine, she said—

"Don't forget that you are in my charge, and if you are invited to any entertainments at the palace I shall be quite ready to chaperone you. There is to be a large gathering before long in the Durbar Hall when the Rajah passes in procession before his nobles. I believe it is a religious function. It will be followed later by another, a kind of levee, when the Rajah will hold his first court. When the time comes, I will call for you. I shall see you before then."

"Can't I join you in the hall?"

"No; you can't, Delphine," replied Mrs. Constable, decisively. "At these big public gatherings we ought to arrive and enter together. You may return with Ted if you like."

"Is it a very important matter in a place like this? The few English people who live here will surely understand my position," said Delphine, who thought that her friend was inclined to be a trifle fussy.

"I am not considering them. It is what the natives will think—the Dewan and the nobles—that is of consequence."

Delphine was slightly mystified, but, not wishing to be tiresome or to detain her guest any longer, she refrained from asking any more questions. There was probably much to learn in this strange new country. It would all come in time.

Mrs. Constable drove straight back to her bungalow for the very excellent reason that there was no one else to call upon. During the drive, which was very short, she uttered the oft-repeated exclamation, "H'm!" more than once. She lunched at two, and was joined by her husband, who had been busy at a large dispensary in the more thickly populated part of the town.

The servants having put the dishes on the table, retired, as was the custom, until the handbell by Mrs. Constable's side summoned them. No sooner had they disappeared, than she addressed her husband.

"George!"

The name was discharged from her lips like a bomb. It occasioned no surprise on the part of the doctor, but carried with it a fund of information that could with difficulty have been described by words. He replied with extreme mildness.

"Well, my dear!"

It was a habit they had contracted. Who had originated it neither knew. The sharper and louder the pronunciation of the christian name, the greater the agitation and more stirring the news. If the doctor entered and shouted "Mary!" in a stentorian tone, the whole household was aware that he had just been through stirring times. Whichever spoke, the reply of the other was invariably mild; the greater the excitement shown, the milder the response.

Dr. Constable gauged his wife's perturbation accurately by the sound of his name, and he looked up from his plate of soup with curiosity. She had something important to tell him.

"I called on Delphine Dersingham to-day."

"What is she like, now she has grown up?"

"As pretty a girl as one wants to meet any day."

The doctor's ideas on women's beauty did not always coincide with those held by his wife. He committed himself no further than by uttering his wife's favourite expression, "H'm!"

"She has good features and the most lovely violet eyes you ever saw."

"Ah!"

This time there was no reserve of opinion. Violet eyes in a land of black and brown were a sight for the gods from an Englishman's point of view.

"She has the most delightful home, every detail complete, nothing forgotten. The garden is worthy of a palace. There is a riding horse provided for her, and she has the use of the palace carriages and motors."

"Very good of her brother," was the doctor's comment.

"It's not Ted's doing," snapped his wife, as she put down her spoon and lifted her hand over the table bell to ring for the next course.

"Whose is it, then?" asked the doctor, flapping his dinner napkin over his knees.

"The Rajah's."

The name was shot at him in a tone that conveyed volumes. Their eyes met, and he repeated, mildly—

"The Rajah's?"

The hand hovered in the air over the bell.

"The Rajah's!"

If anything, the discharge of the name was louder than before; and it was further emphasized by the clang of the bell struck immediately afterwards with a force that made the servants in the verandah fly to their duties as if they had been summoned by a fire alarm.

CHAPTER XI.

The horse proved all that woman could desire in the way of a mount. At half-past four o'clock the Rajah rode up to the bungalow with Ted in attendance. Delphine was already in the saddle, waiting for them. Four sowars, with jingling accoutrements and lances strapped to their arms, jogged some twenty paces behind their prince. Delphine glanced at the brilliant uniforms and bright bay horses and asked if an escort was necessary by way of protection. Ted explained that His Highness rarely went out without a guard. She caught the Rajah's eye and smiled, saying that it was not easy to remember his new estate.

"You will have to dispense with your escort when you play polo, Rajah," she remarked, as they trotted away.

"We will dispense with the men this afternoon as soon as we have passed through the town," he replied.

They moved slowly through the densely-crowded streets, two of the sowars going in front and calling to the people to stand back as the most High and most Excellent Presence was approaching. It was a strange and novel sight to the English girl to see how the conservative town greeted its sovereign. Every individual, old and young, bent low, with folded hands. Many of the old men prostrated themselves in the warm dust, and touched the ground with their foreheads after the fashion of their fathers in years gone by. Women endeavoured to efface themselves behind doors and buildings. Children, agape with awe, hid themselves in

their mother's sarees in fear lest the sowars should trample them underfoot. In every direction honour and reverence was apparent, indicating a deeply-rooted loyalty that had its origin in fear of the office rather than in love of the individual.

To her surprise, the Rajah received it without recognition. He neither smiled nor so much as lifted a hand to acknowledge the homage of his subjects, but sat erect in the saddle, his eyes alone moving as he glanced now and then to the right or left of his horse's ears. She wondered at his unresponsiveness, and again she was conscious of a phase in his character that had never before been revealed. She was not aware that this method of accepting homage was strictly correct from an oriental point of view, and that nothing else was expected of him. As a child, sitting by the side of his father when they drove out, he had learned how to conduct himself in proper fashion. It came back to him now, and he dropped into it insensibly. Delphine would have been astonished to learn that there were occasions when he did not come up to the standard of tradition in the eyes of the Dewan and nobles, when he was not sufficiently impassive.

Once beyond the limits of the town his features relaxed slightly, and when Ted, at his request, ordered the guard to wait whilst they went on alone, the slow smile relieved his lips of the downward curve that gave his mouth its expression of melancholy.

After passing a few cultivated fields, they came to open country, where neither hedge nor ditch impeded progress.

"Now for a good gallop, Miss Dersingham," cried the Rajah, in a voice that took her back to the roads and meadows of Warwickshire.

His animation returned with one of his sudden changes of mood. The keen air of the plateau exhilarated steed as

well as rider, and they galloped without drawing rein till the domes of the palace were purple against the flaming western sky.

"Splendid!" exclaimed Delphine, in pure enjoyment.

"Time to turn back if you want to get in before dark, Highness," remarked Ted, as they stopped to give the panting horses their wind.

"The night is a long way off yet," said Delphine, reluctant to return.

She felt as though she could have gone on another five miles at least, having no experience of the exhaustive nature of the climate on man and beast.

"That's all you know about our Indian sunsets," answered Ted.

They walked their horses, chatting freely of trivial matters, often laughing, sometimes disputing in friendly fashion as they had been wont to do in earlier days. Delphine's spirits rose, and she congratulated herself that she had re-established her friendship with the Rajah on the old footing. They picked up the escort and reached the town as the sun sank below the horizon.

The streets were still thronged with pedestrians and slowly-moving bullock-carts. The sowars thrust aside the traffic with small ceremony, and cleared the road for the riders. Again the immobility of countenance was presented to the salaaming crowd, and the Rajah imperceptibly slipped out of the conversation. Delphine found that her remarks were responded to by Ted.

They parted at the entrance of the bungalow grounds in the fast fading glow of the orange sunset. Delphine nodded a friendly farewell to her companions as she turned in at the open gateway. She did not observe a figure standing in the shadow of the wall; but the dark blue saree caught the eye of the Rajah, and he knew that the time of his departure and return would be carried to the zenana that evening with

other details, and that he must be prepared for a volley of questions if he visited the Ranees the next morning.

Delphine enjoyed her ride more than a little. She was also elated at what she considered was her success in resuming the old relations. As she watched his attitude in the town she came to the conclusion that there were occasions when the Rajah had to play a part. It was expected of him, and he could not do otherwise than act as he did. Her opinion was confirmed when the ride was repeated on subsequent afternoons. The same homage was offered and received with the same immobility. When the town was passed and the guard dispensed with and they were alone, there was the same relaxation. The Rajah became his natural self, and was not afraid to express his joy and pleasure.

If the enjoyment was great to Delphine, it was ten times greater to her companion. She little guessed what it meant to him, and how he looked forward through all the weary ceremonies and business of state to those two hours spent in the saddle with only the brother and sister as companions. The restrictions of royalty, the obligations of religious ritual, were left behind with the four sowars ; and Narayan laughed, and returned repartee for repartee without fear of spies or loss of dignity in the eyes of his critical aristocracy.

The sowars were well content to wait for their Prince, and leave him to the care of the watchful Englishman, known as the secretary sahib. They picketted their horses by the reins and gossiped or gambled away the welcome hour of idleness. On their return to the palace they sold news of imaginary conversations said to have been overheard as they rode by their charge. It was vague, and not of an incriminating nature ; the conversation was described as being adulatory on the part of the Englishman, and condescending on the part of the Rajah. It served to amuse

the Ranees and the Dewan and any other "Excellency" who might choose to spend a small sum over it, and it caused no mischief.

The ride was not always taken in the same direction. Sometimes a visit was paid to the race-course, where horses in training were put through their paces and the polo-ponies exercised. Stables were inspected and general orders given by the Rajah, which were to be carried out by Ted subsequently. Sometimes the new polo-ground was the object of their attention, or they rode to look at the waterworks that were nearing completion.

Then there were days when the Rajah sent word that he would be unable to go out, and when this was the case Ted was equally unable to get away from his duties; not that the Rajah required his presence, but Ted himself declined to leave the palace lest he should by any chance be wanted. It was on these occasions that Delphine found opportunity to drive out with Mrs. Constable to that lady's satisfaction. Or she sat in the garden among the roses with Royama as her companion.

Delphine questioned Ted once or twice as to the reason for the Rajah's detention. He was very reticent, and either made some trivial excuse, or declared ignorance on the subject. He may have known; but, if so, he would not have told his sister that the Rajah fed a motley crew of beggars when he should have been in the saddle; or made an offering to the god of death on behalf of his ancestors. If these things had to be, the least said of them the better. He would have been glad to ignore them altogether, for he felt the indignity in connection with the man whose nationality and obligations he had not recognized in past days.

The doctor's wife was much exercised in her mind over the frequent rides. It was the only time when she was unable to fulfil her duties as chaperone. She had to be

content to leave it to Ted, who was always of the party. How was it all to end? She could see with half an eye that the Rajah was attracted, but could not determine in what way. Had there been anything in the nature of a flirtation between them at Dersingham? Was Delphine in love with him? She watched them when they were together, but could detect nothing definite on either side pointing to any other feeling than one of long standing friendship. Even when she discovered that on more than one occasion the Rajah had consulted Delphine on social matters, and had taken her advice, she could not accuse either of anything more than intimate friendship. Her husband assured her that no danger existed. He liked Delphine, with her frank, impulsive speech and natural manner, and he believed in her sound good sense. The friendship of the English girl and her brother saved the Rajah from relapsing into the futile life of the palace. It also saved him from falling helplessly under the influence of "the old cats," as Dr. Constable irreverently termed the Ranees in the privacy of his wife's room. Mrs. Constable received his remarks with her usual ejaculation and reserved her own opinion.

Others observed the friendship and wondered how it would end.

Harlesden lost no time in coming to call; but, through press of business, he was obliged to let a few days elapse before accomplishing it. He appeared at the orthodox hour, dressed as if he were just about to stroll down to his London club. His greeting was that of an old friend in a foreign land, and he apologized for not having come before. He lived some distance away, and was unusually busy. They related their experiences of the journey out, comparing the advantages of the different lines and ships by which they had travelled. Mrs. Constable was mentioned, and the rest of the Europeans of Shivapet. He inquired how

her brother liked the appointment of secretary, and whether he found his duties arduous. She told him of Ted's experiences with the Ranees, and they laughed together over some of his dilemmas, as well as those of Dr. Constable.

"Do you find the Rajah altered?" he asked, suddenly.

She glanced at him and hesitated. It was not easy to give a definite answer. She took refuge in personalities, and replied that the turban which he invariably wore now had altered his appearance. The loss of the moustache had exposed the mouth and shown its serious lines, which had hitherto been hidden.

"It gives him almost a sad look when his mouth is in repose; yet he was distinctly cheerful and full of good spirits in England."

"His life here has anxieties which never entered his life in England," Harlesden replied.

"I can see that it is so, although I don't know what they are," rejoined Delphine, quickly.

She looked at him with inquiry.

"He has a difficult position, being the pioneer of many reforms which Shivapore finds it hard to assimilate. He is really a splendid fellow, one of the finest products of modern India. Of course, no one can tell at present whether he will prove the success we anticipate; but there is every promise that he will fulfil our expectations."

Delphine listened to this unstinted praise with surprise. When Harlesden was at Dersingham he had seemed over critical of the Rajah. Nothing of the kind was apparent in his present attitude. He showed himself to be genuinely appreciative of his good points, and gave his opinion with an ungrudging generosity that warmed her heart towards him.

"I am glad you recognize his good qualities," she remarked.

"I not only recognize them, but I value them highly,

because I thoroughly understand the many difficulties with which he has to contend. You have probably seen something of him since your arrival."

He spoke indifferently, but he listened with anything but indifference for her reply.

"He joins Ted and me in our rides whenever he can spare the time; and he has been to call once or twice. His visits are not very satisfactory."

"How so?"

"He is absent-minded, and not altogether at his ease. He seems tired out or bored beyond words by the business of the day. When he comes he is often glad to rest, but he never stays long. He has a good deal to think of, I should say."

"Perhaps he has."

"And many appointments, which he remembers suddenly, and hurries off to keep them. Only yesterday he was here at half-past three to tell me that he had bought another horse that would carry a lady, and would be glad if I tried it. I had ordered tea at a quarter to four. Daniel did not know that the Rajah was with me, as I happened to be in the verandah when he came up, and I invited him in without calling the butler. So the tea was brought in; and Daniel nearly dropped the tray in his endeavour to make a suitable salaam. He always looks as though he wanted to grovel before the Rajah."

"Conscious of his very inferior caste," commented Harlesden.

"The Rajah rose at once and said good-bye. I begged him to stay, and offered him some tea. He looked almost alarmed at the mere thought of such a thing, and strode off with a few hasty words of excuse. Do you think he was offended at the butler's entrance?"

"No; although he would not like the man to approach too near because of his caste."

"Poor Daniel seemed more terrified than the Rajah. He put down the tray as quickly as he could, and retreated in abject humility—servility would be a more accurate description."

"It was you who offended."

"I? Impossible! The Rajah and I are the best of friends. His accession to the throne has made no difference whatever in our friendship in private."

Delphine's head was uplifted in a fashion he knew of old—and liked. This pride should be her safeguard as she moved along the somewhat thorny path she had elected to follow in coming out to her brother.

"All the same, I must differ with you. The offence was unintentional, but it was none the less given when you invited him to stay to tea."

She stared at him in blank astonishment, unable to believe her ears. It sounded incredible.

"I am afraid I don't understand you," she said, coldly.

The impression was gaining ground in her mind that he was inventing obstacles.

"It would be impossible for the Rajah to join you in any meal—now."

"Why?"

"Because his caste has been restored by many tedious ceremonies and at great expense. To take tea with you would break it, and render necessary the repetition of all those ceremonies. Hasn't your brother explained all this?"

"He never talks of the Rajah, and he tells me nothing of the life in the palace. I have asked him more than once how the Rajah passes the day, but he evades my questions. Only this morning at breakfast in reply to a request for information on a certain subject, he said that a secretary's business was to write and not to talk. He doesn't mind speaking of the Ranees, and his adventures with them in

the purdah room; but of the Rajah's personal affairs he is absolutely mute. I have come to the conclusion that he has no curiosity, and that he is really ignorant."

She spoke with more heat than she was aware of; and Harlesden's reply did not lessen it.

"Your brother is quite right. A silent man in the East treads with safety. I will explain, if you like, what he is diffident about mentioning. The Rajah has many restrictions in his present life which were not necessary when he was living in England. One of them is his inability to join Europeans in taking any form of refreshment. He cannot dine with them, drink a cup of tea, or even accept a sweetmeat."

"It sounds incredible, and borders on the ridiculous," said Delphine, with impulsive candour.

"Nevertheless, it is true."

He intended to be convincing, but he failed. The Rajah might refuse to join the Resident in a formal dinner party—that was one thing; but it was quite another to assert that he would not take a cup of tea at her hands. How often she had passed him a cup over her mother's little tea-table at Dersingham! So often that she knew exactly how he liked it, its strength, the quantity of milk, cream and sugar. As for coffee, Harlesden himself had seen him take it gratefully from her own hand. She reminded him of the fact, and added—

"The Rajah has never yet refused a cup of coffee from me. I am quite sure—given a fair opportunity, when the Dewan is not watching him—that he will not refuse if I offer it."

Her heightened colour and shining eyes were not lost on her visitor. He smiled provokingly, as he said—

"He will!"

"He shall not! I will make him take it!"

There was admiration and something else in addition

in the eyes that met hers; but she was too excited to take warning.

"Don't try," he said, softly.

"I shall certainly try. It is a challenge. You have thrown down the glove, and I pick it up. We shall see who will win. You may be quite certain that I shall make the attempt and shall succeed."

For the first time, a shadow of anxiety crept into his face. He thought that he might possibly have gone too far. Yet the temptation to provoke her was strong.

"I did not mean to challenge you," he said, repentantly.

"You doubted my power."

"Indeed, I did not. I know your power; it is great."

"You have never felt it," she cried, still combative.

She met his eye defiantly. Something in it, an expression she could not define, brought sudden confusion. He had shifted his ground.

"Have I not? I am feeling it now in my gladness at meeting you again. Delphine, don't tempt the Rajah. After all, prince or no prince, he is only a man; and there is no telling what a man may not do when he is tempted by a woman he"—he checked himself, and continued—"by a woman whose regard he values. There is nothing for instance, I would not do if——"

"You!" she cried, startled.

"Yes; I! Myself! If you bade me."

She was beginning to understand, and again the fresh English colour flooded her cheek.

"Mr. Harlesden, please don't talk like that," she said, her indignation over the Rajah melting away as the conversation took this unexpected turn.

"Very well, we will be wise as owls," he replied.

Her sudden transition from anger to entreaty, and the change in the current of his own thoughts caused him to be in danger of losing his head altogether. He withdrew

his eyes with an effort, and regained control of himself as he looked out through the open doorway into the garden beyond. In those few moments he recovered his equilibrium. She, too, dropped back into her usual manner, and returned to the charge.

"Wise or unwise, I should much like to show you that I am right and that you are wrong; but I daresay the opportunity will never occur, since he runs away terrified at the sight of our dear old English tea-tray. It makes me laugh to think that such terror is possible."

Harlesden joined in the laugh, and the rest of his visit passed evenly. He stayed some time, longer than was necessary for a formal call; but neither he nor she found the time hang heavy. The subject of the Rajah's caste was not alluded to again, and Harlesden hoped that she would forget her threat. His hope was in vain. As he drove away the thought uppermost in her mind was how she could prove to him that he was wrong.

CHAPTER XII.

The Dewan sat close to the purdah on one side and the senior Ranee was as near on the other as the platform would allow. No interpreter was required, and conversation flowed without check.

The subject was strictly confidential. By way of introduction, the Dewan presented the Ranees with two fine pearls a-piece. Those given to Sitrama were larger and of better quality than the others.

After the presentation some minutes were spent in complimentary speeches on both sides. The Dewan next informed them of the manner in which, according to his account, he had procured the pearls. They had actually come from a Bombay dealer; and this the Ranees had learned at the time of their purchase from one of their servants, who had had it from one of the Dewan's servants. The tale told by the Dewan was different. He explained, with a fine imagination, that he had sent an expert at his own expense to the Ceylon fisheries with orders to buy the very best produced that season. The fishery had not proved a great success, and he regretted that the pearls were not finer.

The Ranees replied that, in their opinion, they were magnificent gems, fit for the crown of a reigning prince; and they assured him that they were larger and of a purer colour than any they already possessed—another piece of fiction gratifying to both donor and recipients without deceiving any one.

The Dewan then informed them that he was sending another trusted expert all the way to the Persian Gulf to procure an unrivalled rope of pearls for his daughter in preparation for her wedding. She was eleven years old, and marriageable; and already he was in treaty with a cousin of the Gaikwar of Manora.

"A very proper marriage," commented the senior Ranee. "He is doubtless rich, for the Dewan Bahadur would never permit his favourite daughter to marry one who had neither honour nor wealth."

The Dewan was flattered as she intended he should be.

"His father and his grandfather before him gathered together much gold which was buried under the floor of the zenana. It has been undisturbed, and it is confidently said that there are at least fifty lacs. Besides this treasure, he has jewellery to the value of three lacs; and he owns much land."

"A rich husband is a desirable acquisition when the bride is not well off," remarked the second Ranee, astutely.

"My daughter is well dowered," the Dewan assured her. "She will take four lacs of jewellery, chiefly diamonds and pearls, to her husband."

There was a pause while the four Ranees assimilated this piece of news.

"Is she healthy?" asked the third Ranee.

"Excepting childish complaints, she has never had a day's illness. She will bear her husband many sons, after the manner of my own sister, who is the mother of five strong men."

"Is she gentle and obedient?" inquired the senior Ranee.

"So gentle, so obedient that one has only to give a look and she fulfils one's wish. The mother of the Gaikwar's cousin will find her a loving daughter."

"Is she beautiful?" asked the fourth Ranee.

"She is like the lotus bud resting on the blue surface of the lake."

Again a pause ensued as the Ranees reviewed this glowing account of the prospective bride.

"She is just the kind of wife we should desire for our son," said the senior Ranee.

The Dewan's eyes shone with hope. Matters were progressing even more smoothly than he had anticipated.

"It is kind of your Highness to say so," he replied. "May you have the same good fortune as has fallen to the lot of the mother of the Gaikwar's cousin. There is nothing that gladdens the heart more than the warmth of young grandchildren in one's arms. We, of our household, have experienced that gladness. Our son's wife has been blessed these three times, and all are sons, as is usual in our family—we are a strong race. I wish that the joy may be yours before long. And now, with your Highnesses kind permission, your servant will take his leave."

The Dewan had no intention of departing, nor had the Ranees any intention of letting him go. All the same, it was deemed fitting to the dignity of all concerned that he should be allowed to make a show of leaving. He brought his feet to the ground, rose from the chair, and made a low salaam, taking a few steps backwards. The curtain was shaken, and the Dewan stopped.

"If your Highnesses have more to say, I, your humble servant, am ready to listen."

He returned to the chair, and reseated himself at the command of the senior Ranee.

"Dewan Bahadur, there is a small matter that we would say. If the arrangements with the Gaikwar's cousin should come to nothing through the malevolence of the stars, we might speak to our son concerning your daughter. In his case the stars might be favourable."

"As you please, most gracious ladies; but I must

inform you that their respective horoscopes seem to promise well, and there is little likelihood of negotiations falling through. No advances have been made by any other family to the Gaikwar's cousin for an alliance."

The politely indifferent tone, a masterpiece of diplomacy, almost deceived the Ranees. If it was true that he had proceeded as far as he had represented with the preliminary arrangements, their spy had proved sadly inefficient. Sitrama's eyes fell on the pearls, and her spirits revived. She cast aside momentary credulity and consigned the Dewan's story of the Gaikwar's cousin to the same category as that of the procuring of the pearls. The gift, by no means insignificant, had its object. If the girl were already betrothed, the advance on the part of the Dewan would be money thrown away. The pearls were intended to pave the way to a far more ambitious alliance than marriage with the cousin of the Gaikwar.

The next observation might have seemed irrelevant; but its true meaning was not lost on the Dewan. It came from the senior Ranee.

"We have not had the honour of a visit from your family lately."

To mention the wife and daughter by name was not only impolite, but unlucky. He understood exactly what was meant. The Ranees wished to see the girl and have a talk with the mother. Hope grew as the gods thus showed their favour.

"Your Highnesses are very good to give even a single thought to my poor family. I have arranged for them to go on a pilgrimage to the big temple and carry an offering from me that my plans for my daughter's marriage may prosper."

"That is a pity," snapped the second Ranee, her face as near the purdah as she could get it.

"Sister, do not trouble His Excellency, the Dewan, with

regrets," said the senior Ranee, sharply. "We will ask Gopaula Bahadur to allow his family to pay us a visit."

The Dewan started; but he replied none the less smoothly.

"You will be pleased with his daughter, who has lately returned from England."

"We are told that the ceremonies for the restoration of her caste are being performed as quickly as possible."

"That is so," admitted the Dewan.

"And, doubtless, she will become purdanasheen again," said the second Ranee.

"His Excellency does not intend to shut her up unless he finds it necessary," said the Dewan.

"How should he find it necessary?" asked the third Ranee.

"See the trouble he is put to, Highness. Wherever she goes he must follow, ever on the watch lest she should shame him."

"She has learned to behave in this unbecoming manner through being with Englishwomen. It is said that they act like men," said the senior Ranee.

"I have been told so," replied the Dewan, in confirmation. "If your Highnesses show disapproval of such unmaidenly conduct, and refuse to receive Gopaula Bahadur's daughter until she conforms to our customs, it may bring her to regard the matter in a proper light. I should like to show you my daughter, that you may see what a Hindu girl of good birth may be, if brought up with care."

Thus he opened the question again, and, after much beating about the bush, the visit was fixed for that very afternoon. The little fiction of her being already betrothed was carefully preserved, but neither side was deceived. The Dewan returned to his house confident that his scheme would bear fruit. It did not seem to cross the minds of the

plotters that the Rajah himself might have something to say to it. Who ever heard of bride or bridegroom presuming to have an opinion on their own marriage? They were the last to be consulted, if consulted at all; and their personal feelings were not to be thought of.

The Ranees retired to their quarter of the palace satisfied with the progress made. Before separating to their different apartments, the senior Ranee invited the others to her room that they might talk over what had occurred. The discussion would be chiefly between the senior and the second. The third and fourth might chime in with a question here and there, but their influence was small.

The room occupied by the senior Ranee was spacious and lofty compared with the other apartments. It rejoiced in two windows, high up and uncurtained, impossible to reach except by mounting upon a stool. The venetians, with which they were shuttered, opened towards the sky, letting in light enough to suit women of no occupation other than that of killing time. Mats and cushions abounded. The furniture consisted of a couple of chairs and a round pedestal table. Under the table lay a confused heap of picture books, a cardboard box, containing three large wax dolls, dressed in the latest English costumes—one in evening, one in promenade, one in morning dress. On the table were a number of mechanical toys, two or three clocks, a musical box, hair brushes, combs, and several hand-glasses, together with other trifles, mostly of the glittering bauble class. They were presents brought by the Rajah for his mothers. The senior Ranee was deputed to apportion them, a task not yet performed. Meanwhile, all were content to amuse themselves with the treasures whenever she invited them to her room.

The fourth Ranee went straight to the table and took up a miniature motor car. She diligently turned the key, enjoying the sound of the click-click of the spring, already

broken from persistent winding. This fact did not spoil her pleasure in the toy. She had no desire to see the carriage run by itself. If she wanted it to move, she preferred to push it along the surface of the table. The charm of the toy was in the winding.

The third Ranee stood near her, looking on, her white garments slipping off her shaven head unheeded. In her fingers, tightly clasped, were the two pearls, her share of the gift presented by the Dewan. She could never wear them herself, being a widow. Her sole pleasure was confined to toying with the gems, gazing at their purity as they lay in the olive palm of her hand, and allowing imagination to run riot in an impossible world of fancy where she was a happy wife and mother.

"Show me your pearls, sister," she said, as the winding ceased for a short spell.

The other good-naturedly put down the toy, and, untying a hidden corner of her saree, displayed her treasure.

"Nay; do not touch, sister. The pearls are so like each other that if they are mixed we shall not be able to separate them. You keep yours, and I will keep mine. They are good pearls. One can see the foaming sea in their surface."

Poor thing! She had never seen the sea, but she had heard pearls so described.

"What will you do with yours?"

"Keep them till our son has a wife. If she is a good, modest, obedient child, I will have them made into ear ornaments, and she shall wear them when her husband comes to see her. If she is adorned and made beautiful, he will come often, and we shall see him oftener than now."

She secreted them again and took up the toy.

"That is a good thought of yours. I will do the same with mine; but I shall not give them to her," said the other.

"Listen, sister. I like this clicketty noise that the carriage makes in its stomach when I turn the handle. It is like a tiny well-beaten tomtom. The outside world which we may not enter, makes the same busy noise. They may shut the town away from our eyes, but it reaches our ears. I often listen and wonder what all the men and women who make the sounds are doing. Now see how the wheels run round and lose their form, like the wings of a bee in flight."

The senior Ranee had seated herself upon a fine grass mat with the second Ranee opposite. The attendant women were ordered to retire to the other side of the room.

"The Dewan is very eager for this. He values the honour highly," remarked the senior Ranee.

"She will be Ranee of Shivapore. Where else could he look for such a position for his daughter?" replied the second. "Is it likely that there has been any advance made on the part of the Gaikwar's family?"

"It was nothing but talk."

"The Dewan is known to be rich. Where there is plenty of honey, flies, large as well as small, are likely to come."

Both were silent for a space. Then the two looked at each other as the unspoken thought passed from mind to mind.

"Others besides the Dewan may have thought of our son as a husband for a daughter," said the second Ranee. "There is Gopaula Bahadur."

"That can never be," said the senior, decisively. "She has broken her purdah, and has learned things in a strange land only known to men. She has crossed the sea and ridden in railway trains unveiled. When she talks it is said that she lifts her head and looks straight at the speaker, answering like a man. Pah! What could we do with such a woman in the zenana?"

"She might die," said the second Ranee, thoughtfully. "But there are difficulties in these days, when an English doctor sahib——"

She was interrupted by the entrance into the room of an elderly woman, who made four separate salaams with careful ceremony.

"Speak, slave!" commanded the senior Ranee. "What have you to tell?"

The two Ranees playing with the toys drew near to listen. The doings of the world outside the walls had more attraction for the poor prisoners within than any toys or jewels. They were self-incarcerated, be it understood, for none would have suffered more shame and disgrace than the Ranees themselves had they been liberated.

"My gracious ladies! Lights of the palace! Mothers of the great city! I bring strange news!"

"Speak, speak! thou daughter of a snail! How did our noble son pass the afternoon of yesterday?"

"Kill me not, merciful Highness! I tell but the truth! He went riding on the new riding-ground near the palace. The English missie sahib, who lives in the writing sahib's bungalow, went with him, seated on another horse. She rode not behind, but by the side of the Presence. Sometimes her horse passed in front, thus shaming him in the eyes of the guard."

"Aiyoh! woman! You lie!"

"It is true, oh, mother of the moon! Would that I could have prevented such disgrace!"

"How did His Highness take it?"

"The Presence behaved as though he were under some evil spell. She looked back at him as she passed and laughed. Such laughter it was as would have killed us with shame."

"Did he not call the guards to seize her and take her back to the writer sahib's bungalow?"

"The Presence laughed too. It was loud laughter, like hers, with no hand before the mouth. Then she swung round the handle of the whip she carried as though she would strike something beneath the horse's feet; and the Presence still laughing did the same, shouting strange words in the missie sahib's tongue."

"Was it some Christian pujah?" asked the third Ranee.

"We knew not. We watched them for many minutes as they rode to and fro across the new ground. The sowars stood at the corner next the road leading to the gates. Near them was a syce. I approached him and asked, 'What does the Presence do with the English miss?' He replied that His Highness was preparing to play a game of ball with the missie sahib. The English, he said, all play ball. Some beat balls with iron-shod sticks, standing in the fields and striking with sufficient force to break a man's skull; some beat the ball with a long bit of wood in front of three sticks that represent their gods; some with corded spoons over a net wall; some with long-handled hammers as they sit on horses; some kick the balls with their feet. The balls are of all sizes, from a small orange to a man's head. 'By whose orders do they kick and beat balls?' I asked. 'By order of their pujaris,' the syce replied, and he must know, because he serves the writing sahib."

"Why should such an order be given?" asked the second Ranee.

This marvellous story was fully believed by all four.

"They are a fierce and warlike people, those English; who must be always fighting and beating someone. It is by this means only that they are prevented from killing each other."

"But the missie sahib; would she too beat and fight?"

"She is strong; who knows? The syce said that at Bombay and Calcutta the English ladies beat balls over

the wall of net. They do it that they may bear children fierce and strong, like their fathers. When the babies are but a few months old they give them balls to beat with their little hands and to creep after as soon as they can move by themselves."

"And the writing sahib, what does he do?"

"He laughs and talks also, but he does not push in front of the Presence. It is the English missie who shows no respect, no fear. She speaks to the Presence as if she were his father and mother. The women in her country behave like this when they are married. She treats him as though she were his English wife."

It was said with the intention of creating a sensation, and the speaker was successful.

"His wife!" repeated the four Ranees, gazing at each other in consternation. Such a thought had not entered their heads up to the present. It was supposed that there might be undue influence, but that such a tie could be formed was considered impossible.

"This is not good news, sister," remarked the second Ranee.

"It is impossible!" cried the senior Ranee, Sitrama, the old spirit flaming up. "It cannot be! It shall not be! She is not of our faith!"

"She has no caste. She eats food prepared by outcaste servants," added the third Ranee.

"And she will never, never consent to live behind the purdah," remarked the fourth.

They were interrupted by the entry of another elderly woman, who made the same respectful salaam as she craved permission to speak.

"Say on!" commanded the senior Ranee. "What news of the Dewan's household?"

"The family is well, and the girl your Highnesses would know about is healthy and strong."

"That is yesterday's news. We would hear to-day's. How did the Dewan spend the early morning before he came to the purdah room?"

"He saw His Highness, and they talked of the cleaning of the town. The Dewan was troubled."

"About the cleaning?"

"Gracious ladies! He cares not if the town be clean or dirty. These are English fashions that may be necessary among a masterful folk; but they are not needed here."

"Then why was the Dewan troubled!"

"Because of the dress worn by the Presence. There waited five men from the big temple thirty miles away to present their gift to the Maharajah, with a request that he would attend the new year's festival at their temple, as was the custom of his father. Instead of keeping the men waiting until late in the afternoon, he said he would see them at once. It was as if they were dismissed like beggars, whose presence was an offence. They themselves were disappointed in his conduct. They had come prepared to sit by the palace doors and let all men see that they were awaiting the honour of an audience with the Presence. Also there would have been time to hear news, and tell of the pilgrims that have lately been to the temple. His Highness, having forgotten the ways of his father, commanded that they should be brought in at once. In very shame they dropped their eyes to the ground as they saw their Maharajah."

"Why, what shamed them? Speak, woman, and tell true word only, or you shall be tied by the thumbs from sunset to sunrise," said the senior Ranee.

"It is truth that I speak, soul and life of the zenana! gracious mother of our Prince! It was the dress that the Presence wore which shamed them. It was an English dress, made of white flannel, such as the writing sahib

wears. There was no jewel round his neck nor upon his arm. The only thing suitable to his State was his turban with the large diamond and the aigrette."

"Aiyoh! but this is bad news! The Dewan told us nothing of it."

"His shame was too great to let him speak of it. There was another thing that troubled him. When the messengers from the mahunt of the temple were gone, one of the nobles craved an audience. Again it was granted with indecent haste, even though his Excellency the Dewan dared to say that it would be better to keep him waiting. 'Let him come now and say what he wants,' was the reply of the Maharajah."

"So he was admitted also, although the dress of His Highness was not proper, as it should have been?" asked the senior Ranee, glowering at the bearer of such bad news as she was compelled to hear.

"Mother of the sun! The noble entered immediately, though he did but ask thus early in order that he might see the Presence before it was dark. The business talk was short, concerning the digging of five new wells, to which no one made opposition. When the talk was over, the Presence did not wait for the Bahadur Rao to ask for leave to depart. He made the farewell sign, and held out his hand English fashion for the other to touch."

"Did he touch it?"

"Would he disgrace himself in the presence of the Dewan by taking advantage of his Prince's ignorance? His Highness has lived so long in England that he has forgotten the customs of our Court. The Bahadur bowed low and walked backwards from the room, making as though he had not seen the hand of His Highness. When he was gone, the Presence looked sadly at the Dewan, and said: "Dewan Bahadur, will these people never be friends as well as subjects?" and the Dewan replied: 'The King's

subjects are safe, but the King's friends walk on the edge of a precipice.' "

"And what said His Highness?"

"'A man cannot live without friends, be he king or beggar; therefore must I seek elsewhere for my friends.' And he looked sorrowful as he said it. When the audience with the Dewan was over, he walked—gracious lady, it is the truth, incredible as it may sound, though the Presence has many carriages—he walked to the writing sahib's bungalow and sat with the missie in the garden where no one could overhear what was said—the pots in which the roses grow being too small to hide even a baby."

Again the four Ranees looked at each other in doubt and perplexity.

"We must hurry on this marriage with the Dewan's daughter," suggested the second Ranee, sure of the senior's approbation.

"His first wife must be of our faith and caste," pronounced the third Ranee.

"Purdanasheen and obedient to her mothers-in-law," added the fourth.

"We will speak to him on the subject to-morrow," said the Ranee Sitrama, and her word was final.

At a sign one of the attendants came forward and began to massage the limbs of the last speaker. The second Ranee turned her attention to a camphor-wood chest, opened for her by one of the women. Another attendant lifted out the treasures—gay silks, soft and scented with otto of rose—and held them so that the widow, who would never again feel the rustling folds about her limbs, might enjoy the touch and sight. Some she unfolded, gazing at the beautiful materials with pathetic longing. All were smoothed and refolded and laid back with deliberate, lingering care.

The third Ranee occupied herself with the dolls, assisted

by her women. The similitudes of smart English women were laid in the lap and nursed baby-fashion, hushed to sleep and cooed over by the Rajah's widow.

The fourth Ranee returned to the mechanical toys. Steamships, motor-cars, vans, wrestling figures, railway engines, were wound, overwound, and wound up again that the ear might be tickled by the rhythmic beat suggesting the drumming of the marriage tomtom.

At the hour for the midday meal the elder Ranee roused herself and gave the word of dismissal. Toys, dolls, and gay soft clothing were relinquished with patient resignation, and each retired to her room to eat, to sleep, to awake, to hear more gossip, to receive friends if friends came, to play again with toys and dolls and soft clothing, and gloat over jewels that might never be worn, to eat sweetmeats and betel-nut until it was time for the evening meal. After which came the night.

CHAPTER XIII.

For a Hindu gentleman of good caste and position, who prided himself on possessing an equable and dignified temperament, the Dewan was in an unusual state of excitement. On his return from his interview with the Ranees, he at once sought his wife.

It was not the customary hour for the master of the house to pay a visit to the zenana. Culinary operations had begun, and it was inconvenient to the mistress to listen to what he might have to say. There were other matters of importance to occupy her undivided attention.

His wife was in the kitchen seated upon a small charpoy, a kind of bedstead with canvas stretched across instead of the splines that form the ordinary bedstead. It was sufficiently elevated to afford a clear and uninterrupted view of the large room, the most important in the house.

Huge pots of steaming rice stood over separate fires, each tended by a woman whose duty it was to feed the fire with sticks as well as stir the rice and keep it from burning. Other women bent over earthenware pots containing savoury vegetable curries rich with butter and cocoanut. Young girls, who could not be trusted with the curries, ground and mixed fresh chutneys with cunning hand, proportioning the ingredients with the delicacy of the mayonaise maker.

The daughters-in-law lent their assistance in the lighter part of the work. Even the little maid, destined by her

father to be the Rajah's bride, was not idle. Her slender fingers moulded balls of pounded cocoanut, spiced with green chillies, intended for her father's consumption.

At the sight of her husband's face in the doorway, the Dewan's wife descended from her perch and joined him, leaving the wife of her eldest son mistress in her absence. The Dewan, without any apology, explained how he had arranged for a visit to be paid to the Ranees that very afternoon by his wife and daughter.

The lady was not pleased, and she showed it. The notice was too short, she objected. How could she dress her daughter and herself in a manner suitable for the occasion by four o'clock? The combing and oiling and scenting of the hair alone would take a couple of hours. She would have to send to the market for flowers to decorate her daughter's head. It was late, and not likely that any good jasmine blossom would be left.

The Dewan brushed aside her objections. They must be ready at the time named. The palanquin and bearers were ordered to be in waiting to take them to the palace.

His wife was not so easily persuaded. Had he consulted the family astrologer, she asked, as to the hour being propitious? An error ever so slight, even though it might be committed in ignorance, would mar the chances of his daughter for life. No; he had not consulted the stars, he was obliged to admit. There had not been time to call the man in to cast the necessary horoscope of the hour chosen.

"Yet you would have me take our daughter into the company of four widows unprotected by charm or amulet, and subject her to their ill-omened gaze!" cried his wife, sharply.

She was irritated at having been disturbed, and still further annoyed at his want of consideration. She added something to the effect that in these matters men had no more sense than buffaloes. But the Dewan ignored the

remark, and centred his thoughts upon the question of the visit. His wife had placed it in a new light. In his anxiety to compass the end he had in his mind, the fact that their Highnesses were widows had escaped his memory. One widow would have been serious enough to encounter. But four! It was courting disaster! Why had he not thought of this when he was making the arrangement? It was all the fault of the purdah. The white garments, the unadorned arms and necks, the ears and noses bare of jewels, with various other signs of widowhood proclaiming the condition of the unfortunate women were concealed from his eyes; therefore he had forgotten their estate.

He paused to weigh his wife's words, and in that pause lost command of the situation. At the sight of his hesitation she gathered courage to oppose his will still more strenuously, for she was genuinely alarmed at the consequences which might ensue. She declared that it would be nothing short of madness to permit the girl to go without proper precautions. It could only bring ruin to all their hopes. She offered to relieve him of all responsibility by sending a trusty messenger with a message praying that she and her daughter might be excused that afternoon, as the family astrologer had pronounced the day to be extremely unlucky for any enterprise to be taken in hand. A tray of sweetmeats should accompany the message, and their gracious Highnesses would perhaps deign to fix a more propitious day for the very great honour they were conferring upon the Dewan's poor family.

He listened to his wife's proposition in doubt, by no means satisfied at the turn events had taken. There was the possible anger of the disappointed ladies on the one hand. On the other was the evil effect of the eyes of four widows upon his daughter if she went without the protection of the astrologer's good offices. In his dilemma he was willing to let his wife go her own way, and he departed

sadly, a rift within the lute that was to chant a wedding song.

Consequently, just before the midday meal was served to the Ranees, the message was brought which was to disappoint them of their visitor that afternoon.

Sitrama, the senior Ranee, was a woman of action and determination. She was annoyed at this seemingly capricious conduct on the part of the Dewan's family, and she attributed it to pride. The message and the tray of sweets were accepted without any exhibition of anger, and the messenger was dismissed with the customary gift of a few small coins. After all, it did not matter whether the girl were brought now or by-and-bye. She intended to promote the alliance with as little delay as possible. The Rajah should marry his first wife to please his mothers. His second and third marriages might be made to please himself. Calling one of her women, she said—

"Go to the house of Gopaula Bahadur, and beg him to allow his daughter to come to the palace this afternoon. We would make her acquaintance, as we hear that she is clever and beautiful."

Thanks to modern education, Royama's father believed quite as much in opportunities as in omens. It was not difficult to draw from the old messenger the fact that the Ranees had been disappointed by the family of the Dewan. It was also understood that they were curious to see for themselves the effect of the English training on the daughter of the Bahadur.

Amabai, who brought the message, was careful to inquire if caste had been restored. It would not do to carry pollution to their Highnesses, even though they had fallen into disfavour with the gods, and been condemned to widowhood. Gopaula assured her that the ceremonies had been duly performed, and the purohits had pronounced her to be purified. Later, his daughter would feed some

Brahman beggars; but this was a ceremony apart from the restoration of caste.

"The excellent lady will be at the palace at four o'clock, accompanied by suitable attendants. She will come purdanasheen in my zenana palanquin. You will see that she is properly received," he said, before he dismissed her.

"Purdanasheen!" repeated the old woman, in some surprise. "It was understood that your most honourable daughter was not keeping her purdah."

"It is a mistake. The purdah is kept as I direct. There have been times when I have permitted it to be broken, and they may occur again. A Bahadur of my position is like the Maharajah. He can choose as he pleases. If he chooses to allow any member of his family to break caste, there is plenty of money to restore it. If he wills that purdah shall be broken, it is broken. As I command, so my household obeys. In visiting their Highnesses, my daughter will observe the old custom strictly, in honour of them."

Amabai was puzzled and much impressed with the Bahadur's attitude. This was quite a new way of looking at the question. He must be a very great man indeed if he could afford to break and restore caste with impunity, and disregard the purdah rule. She departed to give her royal mistresses a highly-coloured account of her reception by the Bahadur, and of his astonishing pride.

"The honourable Bahadur spoke with the haughtiness of a prince. His pride was greater than that of the Dewan," she explained.

To which the senior Ranee replied with incredulity and inherent conservatism, that there could be no pride in a family where purdah was not kept.

Gopaula was distinctly pleased and pleasantly surprised at the turn events had taken. He had secretly hoped that his daughter would be seen by the Ranees; but had

hesitated to propose the visit. The invitation should, properly speaking, come from them. And it had come, unsolicited. No doubt crossed his mind as to Royama's behaviour. She would make the most of her opportunity he was convinced. His confidence in his daughter was almost as great as his confidence in himself.

His wife was not so well content. She was not satisfied that he had done right in accepting the invitation offhand. The same reasons influenced her as had carried weight with the wife of the Dewan, and she duly laid them before her husband; but Gopaula stood firm, fearless of ill-omens, ready to dispense with the aid of astrology when occasion demanded it; and, above all, having the courage of his opinions so deeply rooted that the ancient superstitions of his ancestors could not shake it.

After the midday meal he personally superintended the preparations, closely scrutinizing his daughter's dress and jewels. The very best were brought out of the treasure-chest for her to wear, and there was ample foundation for the pride the parents felt when she displayed herself in all her finery to the admiration of the numerous members of the household. She carried herself gracefully and with dignity. The mother would have liked a little less assurance, a little more of the assumed modesty, supposed to be the height of good manners in the zenana. She was not quite reconciled to her educated daughter, and she failed to recognize in her one of those rare jewels among India's women to whom the western world looks with hope for the establishment of a brighter, wider, fuller life in the zenana.

From the treasures brought back by Royama, Gopaula made a selection of what he hoped would be acceptable to the Ranees. He instructed his daughter how she was to present her gifts. She must try, if possible, to bestow them appropriately, as she observed the different temperaments of their Highnesses. Then he gave her further counsel.

"Although you will preserve your purdah as closely as the daughter of the Dewan, do not put on the senseless, stupid manner of our Hindu girls, my lotus flower. Remember that your greatest jewel is not one that you can clasp and unclasp. It is in your tongue which the English women have taught you to use with magic art. As you have charmed and delighted your brother's wives with your tales till they are never tired of listening, so charm and delight these four poor ladies of the palace. Through your eyes let them see and hear the things that can never come into their dull lives."

Punctual to the hour named the closely-curtained palanquin, with its bearers, attendant runners, and the old personal servant who accompanied her whenever she went out, passed through the palace gateway. The chant to which the bearers trod was the family song of their employer. Amabai, waiting at the entrance of the purdah room, recognized the chant and opened the door. The bearers carried their burden inside, set it down, and retired to wait at the gate until they were summoned.

The silken curtains of the palanquin were pulled aside, and Royama, decked in magnificent jewels and a saree worthy of royalty, stepped out, followed by her duenna. Her dress was entirely oriental, the only western touch being seen in a fine diamond star. The stones, cut and set by skilled Europeans, glittered twice as much as those set in the native ornaments that she wore.

Amabai regarded the visitor with approval as she looked her up and down before pointing the way. She held back the big purdah, hanging across the room, and signed to her to go forward, the duenna following closely, bearing a pile of parcels. Far from being nervous or shy, Royama made good use of her eyes as she moved slowly along the passages. The palace was very like her own home, passages and stairs being out of proportion to the rooms.

She arrived at length at the apartment occupied by the senior Ranee, and was told to wait outside. The eagle, accustomed to its eerie, understands the angles and sharp edges of the crags. She knew the etiquette, and was in no danger of feeling uncomfortable at the delays and the tedious ceremony with which her advent was heralded. They were marks of honour to herself, rather than discourtesies.

She was ushered in, and she made the correct salutations, one for each Ranee, without omitting a single detail. They closely watched their visitor, curious to see how she would conduct herself, and alert to discover any unusual action learned in that mysterious foreign land, which they could never see. The modest bearing and down-cast eyes, as she greeted them, met with their approval. There was nothing to which they could take exception.

The senior Ranee invited her to approach and sit down. A gilded chair, used by the Rajah when he came to see them, was placed invitingly near; but Royama evaded the trap. She was not to be decoyed into the display of any European tricks. She seated herself on a cushion in front of the Ranee, as the daughter of the Dewan might have done without offence, and Sitrama grunted her approval.

Then followed a string of questions from the four Ranees that would have embarrassed any English lady by their pertinacity and their extremely personal nature. They were answered by the visitor with perfect propriety. Personal remarks and personal inquiries were not deemed a breach of good manners, and Royama was not in the least embarrassed by them.

"The truth has not been told about the daughter of Gopaula Bahadur," said the Ranee Sitrama to the second, speaking aloud before the guest.

"It was the Dewan's jealousy that made him talk thus," was the reply.

"She seems modest and gentle," commented the fourth Ranee.

"We have not seen enough to judge what she really is," said the senior Ranee, looking critically into Royama's smiling, pleasant face.

The second Ranee had been affectionately fingering the visitor's saree, mentally comparing it with those that reposed in the camphor-wood box. Jewels and clothes had an irresistible fascination for her. She bade an attendant bring the dolls to show them. The woman returned from the corner of the room, where they had been left, with the cardboard box. Since the midday meal the third Ranee had been busy removing their outer garments. Knowing nothing of the intricacies of English dress, her efforts to re-dress the dolls had had a ludicrous result. The evening bodice, slipped on hinderpart before, hung unfastened on the figure with the walking skirt. The afternoon costume was mixed with the coat belonging to the short skirt.

Royama began to sort out the garments, to the delight of the royal ladies. Before putting the dolls into their respective costumes she undressed them, still further revealing sets of beautifully fashioned underwear. These, she explained, were worn by the English women to keep the body warm in a climate where the summer was no hotter than their own cold season. Then she dressed the dolls again and set them up, pretending that they were real women who were paying visits. She repeated imaginary conversations to the intense delight of her audience, consisting not only of the Ranees but of a number of their attendants. They thrilled with the new interest suddenly created in that marvellous world beyond the ocean, which, if one wished to see, it was necessary to sacrifice one's caste and eat food prepared by strange hands whose owners had no caste. Even the senior Ranee became absorbed in the play. When the doll in the evening dress was made to

dance, the fourth Ranee remembered the musical-box, and called for it. Royama wound it and set it going. To the tune of the latest popular waltz the figure was made to glide and bow and sway in a manner utterly unlike the slow heavy motions of the nautch girl.

From the dolls they turned to the toys. The few that were not broken by overwinding were put into action and made to spin about the table and floor. The use of the various combs, brushes, glasses, and other treasures were explained; and she showed how the triple folding-glass might be arranged to reflect the back of the head. Each Ranee took it in turn to look at herself in this wonderful glass. Sitrama herself was not indifferent to its charm, and claimed her share of it.

Royama had only just begun to relate stories about the pictures in one of the books when the hour sounded at which she was to go back to her parents. The time had passed more quickly than it had done for some months; and the demands for a repetition of the visit at an early period were insistent. She promised all they desired and called for her duenna.

The woman entered bearing her load of parcels. With little cries of delight the Ranees brooded over the new treasures. Yards of soft fine white muslin were presented to Sitrama, material not to be played with and hoarded, but suitable in its simplicity and plainness for a widow to wear. The second Ranee was made happy by the gift of broad sash ribbons of flowery pattern and wonderful sheen. To handle and fold and unfold the long lengths would prove an endless source of pleasure. For the third Ranee Royama produced a large substantial doll with fat limbs, dressed as a baby. It was seized upon before any one else could lay a finger on it; and it was cuddled and rocked and hushed as though it were a living child by the childless widow with a greed that showed how empty was the starving maternal heart.

Lastly, the gift for the fourth Ranee was uncovered from its many wrappings and revealed. It was a mechanical figure, larger than the metal toys and less complicated in its machinery. It required no key, but was wound by a strong handle, which caused it to drum incessantly with a wooden baton upon a hollow box. The clatter was every bit as loud as the beating of a real tomtom, and the regular rhythmic noise met with approbation from the company. Royama had not studied the different characters of her hostesses in vain; she had made a wise dispensation of her gifts.

She performed her farewell salaam, a separate salutation for each Ranee, and was conducted by Amabai to the purdah room. The chant of the bearers came in faintly at the windows as the courtyard of the palace was crossed. The senior Ranee caught the sound.

"Did the honourable lady come by palanquin?" she asked of Amabai on her return.

"The daughter of the Bahadur came and departed in a manner befitting a Hindu lady," replied the old woman.

"Does she always move like this now that her caste is restored?"

"Unlucky is my fate that I should be the one to tell bad news, most excellent mother of the Maharajah. Gracious Highness, it is not always thus."

"When has it been different?"

"Only this morning the lady Royama sat with the English missie sahib. The Presence, without sending notice, paid a visit to the writing sahib's bungalow. He walked, as has already been told; and on his entrance the daughter of the Bahadur, instead of crying out and hiding herself as any well-behaved girl would have done, stood up by the side of the missie sahib and lifted her eyes to his like a man. There was no shame on either side. The

company of the English missie is not good for the honourable Bahadur's daughter."

"How do you know all this, woman?"

"My daughter followed the Presence and crept among the pots below the verandah, wearing a dark blue saree so that she should not be seen. She heard all that passed as she peeped through the green leaves of the plants, and she tells the truth."

There was no shame on either side in the admission of how the information was obtained. The senior Ranee approved of the methods used and paid the woman and her daughter for their services. Sitrama sat for a few minutes in contemplation; then, raising her voice above the drumming made by the fourth Ranee, she said—

"Sisters, we will marry our son to the daughter of the Dewan without delay. A young elephant that is over trained never makes a good worker."

"Marry him to whom you choose," replied the second Ranee, who was immersed in the joy of folding her sash ribbons.

"But let the daughter of Gopaula Bahadur come again soon. When she is here the sun shines with more brightness, and life is sweeter. Already my baby sickens, and I would know from her how to treat it since it is English."

Her eyes fell lovingly in maternal ecstacy upon the figure of the baby in her lap, and the delicate forehead puckered with lines of real anxiety over the imaginary indisposition.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE room set apart for the secretary in the palace was between the Rajah's private suite and the public halls. It was comfortably furnished with tables, chairs, and lounges. The Rajah had been as thoughtful for his friend as for his friend's sister. Although he did not smoke, he had given Ted permission to do so whenever he chose, a privilege he availed himself of in the Rajah's absence.

It was curious how imperceptibly the Englishman had slipped into the position of private secretary, and how his employer was vested unconsciously with the character of royalty. It had not been assumed or put on with any intention; it was purely the outcome of circumstances over which neither had any control. In the old days the Englishman had been wont to take the lead and direct without ceremony. Narayan followed in perfect faith, well content to have so able a leader. He would have been glad under the new conditions to stand aside sometimes and let another show the road, but it was no longer possible. Fate had thrust him into a position of authority, from which there was no escape.

Ted himself aided and abetted the finger of fate by instinctively adopting an attitude of deference. Where in the old days he would have dictated without a second thought he now consulted the wishes of the Rajah refraining even from expressing an opinion. To the orderly mind of the Englishman this condition of affairs was inevitable.

The Rajah might forget that he was a reigning prince—he occasionally did his best to accomplish that end—but Ted never forgot the fact, never forget that his old chum was hedged-in by long-established customs and traditions impossible to cast aside or disregard. For this reason he did not misjudge the aloofness which puzzled Delphine; nor did he tempt the Rajah to break away from the iron band of conservatism and caste. It made no difference in his regard for his old friend. On the contrary, he was often filled with admiration at the patience shown by the Rajah under many ordeals that could not fail to be galling to a public school and University man with any respect for his dignity.

There was only one person in Shivapet with whom the Rajah could forget his state, his subjects, and his duties. In Delphine's company he sometimes succeeded in stepping straight back into the past when Henley, Hurlingham, and Lord's filled his mind. He forgot the shraddah ceremonies, the daily caste observances, the Ranees, and the royalty that dogged his footsteps. She picked up threads where they were broken and linked him to all that was irrevocably gone out of his life, bringing back vividly the memory of the past. He was more grateful for the boon of blessed memory than she imagined when she reminded him of this and that triumph in the field or on the river.

It was a couple of mornings after the Dewan's visit to the Ranees. Ted, seated at the writing-table was busy grappling with the wordy and obscure translations of various petitions sent in to the Rajah. Formerly the Dewan dealt with them. His method was easy, but it was not exactly of a character likely to commend itself to an Englishman. If the petition were accompanied by a substantial gift—usually bank-notes—the Dewan mastered its contents, made a note of them; and when a second gift jogged his memory he took action in favour of the suppliant. The

petition unaccompanied by a gift was cast aside upon a large heap of similar papers in various stages of dust and decay, lying in a corner of the room that was called his office.

Ted conscientiously perused every petition that reached his hand. No gift accompanied the papers. If one was sent it was intercepted by the official whose duty it was to bring in the missives. For the most part the requests were of a trivial nature, relating to the division of property; rights of irrigation in wells, channels, and tanks; the disappearance of sons who had gone to Burmah or elsewhere. Many of the petitions came from the temples; mahunts asked that their rights might be made hereditary; others demanded the election of the mahunt as each vacancy occurred. Many a sad and pathetic story was revealed on one hand. On the other a relieving touch of humour sometimes cropped up, provoking a smile.

Something of the kind must have reached him this morning as he smoked a cigarette and pored over a closely-written page of foolscap with a look of amusement on his face. His attention was diverted by the sound of a step. It was the Rajah. He wore a light English suit. The only oriental feature of his dress was the turban. Ted laid aside the cigarette and rose from his chair, an act of courtesy he never failed to render when the Rajah entered.

"Good morning, Highness," he said as he took up a slip of paper on which were noted the various items requiring attention.

It was his custom to hear what the Rajah had to say before he entered on the business of the day. This morning his greeting was responded to by a nod. Something had occurred to ruffle the Prince's temper more than a little. It was shown by the manner in which he flung himself into a lounge chair near the writing-table. If further evidence were needed it might be heard in the words he

uttered. They were thoroughly British, and had been learned in England.

"Damn these women!"

Ted glanced at his companion and waited. He had seen the Rajah in a similar humour on two or three occasions; and when he heard the cause of his expletives he did not wonder that annoyance found a safety-valve in strong speech.

"It's the Ranees; my four blessed maters. I beg their pardons for swearing at them, but they exhaust my patience."

"Can't I see them for you? They don't annoy me in the same way," said Ted in commiseration.

"Because they are not your maters. Dear kind Mrs. Dersingham! It is sacrilege to mention their names in the same breath with hers," said the Rajah repentantly.

"I suppose it is absolutely necessary for you to go and see them and listen to what they have to say. I wish we could convince them that if they made it pleasanter for you, you would be inclined to visit them oftener."

"They were never taught the art of conversation," said the Rajah, gradually recovering his good humour. "Their idea of it is to ask endless questions varied with requests. Every time I see them they want something new, something difficult to supply, something impossible to grant like the summary punishment of the chauffeur's family. It would be bad enough if there were one stepmother! I have four, each one making a separate demand. To-day, however, strange to say, they were, for once in their lives, agreed, and they all clamoured for the same favour."

Ted did not ask what it was. He had his suspicions; but in this case he was not correct. After a short silence, during which the Rajah seemed to be in deep thought, the latter said suddenly.

"They want me to marry."

Ted leaned back in his revolving chair and looked at him.

"There's nothing wrong about that. The desire is not confined to the zenana."

"They have made choice of a bride, a chit of eleven who has never left her mother's side, the daughter of the Dewan."

"Full young from our point of view," remarked the secretary.

"Below the legal age; but princes are supposed to be out of reach of the common law. So any protest on that score is not of much use."

"The choice need not be confined to a child of that age," said Ted, as the Rajah relapsed into gloomy silence. "There must be daughters of some of the noble families of Shivapore who——"

He was interrupted by the Rajah. "Great Scott, man! You don't understand!" he cried in pardonable excitement. "Am I to be tied to an uneducated fool of a woman who will be no companion, who will repeat all the childish folly I find in my father's wives, who will make one more to pester me with silly questions and still more foolish requests? You were not my only friend in England. There were others with whom I was intimate. They married, choosing their wives themselves; not merely to be the mothers of their sons, but also to be their companions, their friends. Is it an unreasonable desire on my part to wish to follow their example?"

He spoke hotly, and Ted caught a glimpse of the passionate nature that underlaid the European veneer. The dark eyes gleamed with those strange lights seen sometimes in irritated animals. He could understand how easily the Hindu, for all his English training, might break away from constraint and give rein to the dictates of inherited passion. In England this strain of excitable fevered emotion lay

dormant for the excellent reason that nothing occurred to call it into action. In Shivapet scarcely a day passed without a ruffling of the surface. He had felt it himself; and the effects could be seen in Dr. Constable, whom a long residence had made "peppery," as his wife described it. The Rajah did not possess the phlegmatic disposition of the Englishman. He was quickly excited, rapid in action, and strong in speech when irritated. His outbursts of anger in the secretary's room were a safeguard against rash deeds that could only bring repentance. Ted had already learned how to take them. His quiet sympathy soothed the angry man; and when the fit was over, the Rajah was left repentant and not in the best of spirits.

"I am sometimes tempted to believe, Dersingham, that my father made a mistake in sending me to England," said the Rajah, still smarting under the effect of his morning's visit to the zenana. "My nine years in your country have allowed me to look through the gates of an unattainable world; I have been permitted to look"—he paused and then added—"and to long for what can never be the happy fate of the Hindus of this generation."

"You are taking too gloomy a view of the matter. It is not as bad as your Highness thinks. To begin with, there is no hurry over this business. If the Ranees could be made to understand so much, they might be more patient."

"I left them in no doubt of my decision. I told them definitely that I would not marry the daughter of the Dewan. Thereupon they threw themselves at my feet, grovelling and crying, making me feel most uncomfortable and rather a brute. Why can't the women of this country behave in a dignified manner?"

"Your Highness must remember——"

The Rajah interrupted him again with another outburst of impatience, this time directed against the private secretary himself.

"Confound 'your Highness,' Ted!" He used the old familiar name instead of the surname which had been introduced at the same time as the honorific. "Are you slipping away from me too? I shall soon be without a single friend."

"Rot, Rajah! Don't talk rot!" cried Ted in a different tone as he bounded from his chair and marched up and down the room. It was as well that the punctilious Dewan could not see him, or even the precise Harlesden. They would have been scandalized at his familiar manner. "Look here, old chap, you've been eating too many sweets in the zenana! You're as cross as you can be about nothing at all. I'm ashamed of you!"

"They insist on feeding me, all four of them; and I have to treat them fairly and without favour," said the Rajah, weakly.

"Well, it must stop," continued Ted in a dictatorial voice that the Rajah had not heard since they played polo together. "Dr. Constable must be called in and forbid it. What you want is more exercise, more fresh air, less of the palace walls. I hope these religious ceremonies are nearly at an end. They are playing the very deuce with your constitution, and I am sick of hearing that you are wanted for this, that, and the other. The only exercise you take at present is the evening ride, and you don't always get that. You haven't had a good outing in the motor for ever so long. Come with us this afternoon, and put off your interview with the Dewan. We know now what he wants. His business can wait."

The Rajah drew a deep breath. His face cleared and his good-humour returned as he listened to the nearest approach to a scolding that he had had since he was in the English playing-fields. It was the most wholesome tonic he could have had.

"You've done me good already. I wanted a little plain

speech from some one who is as good a man as myself, and I've had it."

"Come and see the tank that they say has run dry because some sanctimonious old johnnie has cursed it. A petition has been sent in with one or two queer statements in it, and I want to look at the tank myself. I feel sure there's some trickery about it. It has been tapped most probably to feed land that has no right to the water. The run out will do you good. It's a matter of thirty miles, too far for the horses."

"Are you going alone?"

"I promised to take Delphine."

"She will not object to a third?"

"Why should she? She will be delighted," he replied, carelessly.

"Then I will come," said the Rajah with equal carelessness.

The two men glanced at each other for one short sharp instant, and then Ted deliberately turned the conversation, dropping back into the secretary's manner as if nothing unusual had occurred.

"About these petitions, Rajah. I've sorted them. There are seven or eight that will take us about half an hour to dispose of. Before you read my notes just look at this."

He held up the foolscap sheet over which he had been smiling when the Rajah entered.

"This is a petition from the four Ranees to you demanding various concessions. I dare say you have heard them all in the zenana. Foremost stands the punishment of the chauffeur's family. They are not satisfied on that point, and won't be till the new car comes, when they will forget all about it in the excitement of the drives. Then they pray you not to ride on the odd days in this next month, as their astrologer has assured them that they are your

unlucky days. Thirdly they beg for my instant dismissal, as I have an evil influence over you, they say. You imitate me in my dress and manners, which are not such as your father would have approved of. They compare me with the thunder cloud that eclipses the sun."

It cheered the secretary to hear the laugh that the Ranees' petition evoked.

"Well done, maters," he said.

"What amuses me most," continued Ted, "is the way they have signed the paper. None of them can write, apparently, so they have had to make their marks. Each signature is in proportion to the rank of the Ranee. Look at the senior Ranee's cross. It is three inches long at least; and the fourth Ranee's mark is so small one can hardly see it."

"Have you sent any reply?"

"The usual thing: their petition has been received, and it will have your Highness's serious consideration."

The Rajah took up the paper Ted had prepared and studied the notes, making a few remarks here and there. With one of his abrupt movements he rose from his chair.

"What time are you starting this afternoon?" he asked.

"Any time that will suit you."

"Let it be three o'clock. You are sure that Miss Dersingham will not be inconvenienced by an addition to the party?"

"I am sure she will be pleased," was the ready answer.

CHAPTER XV.

As the Rajah left the room, returning by the door that led into his private apartments, Ted walked into the verandah for a breath of fresh air. Although he had administered a lecture to his old friend and got rid of the cloud that hung about him, he was not satisfied. It was evident that the Rajah had been severely tried in his interview that morning. He had stood firm thus far and showed no sign of capitulation, but how long would the firmness be maintained? In very weariness of spirit he might give up the struggle and fall under the influence of the zenana when it had the addition of a wife.

It was not so very long ago that Ted would have believed it impossible for four women living in strict retirement to introduce so much worry into a man's life. The Rajah might refuse to marry the Dewan's daughter over and over again; but it would not deter the senior Ranee from pursuing the subject. She would never let it rest, but would persevere with various changes of tactics, unscrupulous and indefatigable to the very end.

The demand for his dismissal was a covert threat. It was known that the petitions went through the secretary's hands. The Ranees had no hope that the Rajah would listen to their request for a single instant, if it came to his notice, which in their opinion was unlikely. The secretary would destroy it without a word, as any Hindu would have done. Ted was beginning to see through it.

"So that is their little game! I am to take warning what I am about. If I oppose their wishes, I may expect to be sent about my business. I wonder what their next move will be."

As if in answer to the question in his mind, a figure in a dark blue saree detached itself from the shelter of the orange trees growing in big tubs along the outer edge of the wide verandah and came forward.

"What are you doing here? What do you want?" asked Ted, with scant courtesy.

"I am waiting till the sahib is not too busy to speak with his humble slave," she replied in broken English and salaaming low.

"What are you here for?"

"To pray your honour to speak with my mother. She brings a message from the honourable Ranees."

The girl made a sign with her hand, and Amabai advanced with a strange mixture of humility, craftiness, and assurance.

"How long have you been waiting to speak to me?" demanded Ted, as suspicion—formerly foreign to his nature—crossed his mind.

He hated himself for the unworthy thoughts that hovered like stinging insects about him; but he had already learned that they were only too liable to have ample foundation. How much had the women overheard?

"Since the shadow on the path shortened by the length of a stride."

Then she was hanging about the verandah before the Rajah entered. What were the sentries and guards about to allow people to pass in and out in this manner? Could he have caught the gleam of silver on the ground near the sentry-box he would have understood how the way was paved. This, with the knowledge that they were the servants of the Ranees, was sufficient to give them a

passport. He turned to the old woman who stood waiting for permission to speak.

"Say on. What is it you want?"

She came nearer and extended her hands, the right placed on the palm of the left. The bony fingers slowly unclosed and displayed a small parcel.

"Take, sahib; it is a gift sent by my gracious ladies, their Highnesses, the Ranees."

As he did not move, she advanced and dropped the parcel into his hand. He received it with perplexity.

"Open, sahib; that I may tell my mistresses you have accepted their gift and are pleased."

He unfolded the packet and found a piece of muslin tightly knotted over some hard substance. The old woman, seeing his diffidence, untied the ends for him and exposed to his astonished eyes a fine large ruby.

"What is this?" he asked.

"A ruby, bright as the blood of a pigeon."

"I don't want a ruby," he said clumsily.

"Some day when the sahib has taken a wife the ruby will sit well upon her white neck, and she will be pleased and her husband proud."

"I'm not going to be married."

He spoke with increasing brevity and an indefinable annoyance. A glimmering of the meaning of the gift made it difficult to keep his temper.

"If the honourable sahib does not marry, the ruby can at any time be turned into money. It will sell for a lac of rupees—perhaps more if it is offered to a Hyderabad dealer."

"I don't want either the money or the ruby. Take it back to the Ranees and tell them so."

Amabai made a gesture of horror at the command. It would be a gross insult to refuse the gift.

"Excellency, I cannot do such a thing. I should be

tied by the thumbs and beaten for having failed in my mission. Your honour would never be so unkind as to bring a poor old woman into such trouble!"

She began to whimper and wipe her eyes with the corner of her saree, whilst the Englishman regarded her in doubt. He did not wish to get her into disgrace; after all, she was but a messenger in no way responsible for her errand.

"What else did the Ranees say?" he asked, sure in his own mind that a request accompanied the gift.

"They would see your Excellency to-morrow morning."

"Very well; I will be in the purdah room at ten o'clock before I go to the Rajah."

"Their Highnesses will be much gratified, for the matter is pressing."

"They always say that," commented Ted.

"It is very pressing, nothing less than the marriage of the Rajah."

"You can take your leave," he said, turning back into his room.

If he thought to escape thus he was mistaken. Amabai crept noiselessly after him and followed boldly into the room. The girl who had listened to the conversation retired to the shelter of the orange trees, and seated herself on the warm sand. She occupied the time in tracing the letters of the alphabet with her forefinger on the ground. Her education, begun at a mission-school, was continued at every opportunity under the guidance of her mother, so that one day she might become one of those confidential links between the zenana and the outer world, and render services that were well rewarded.

"Your honour has doubtless heard that their Highnesses, the Ranees have favourably considered a proposal made by the Dewan that the Maharajah shall wed his youngest daughter. It is a suitable marriage in every way,

and will increase the happiness of the zenana. His Highness is disinclined—— "

"How do you know that, Amabai?"

"The Presence spoke this morning to the Ranees, and left their Highnesses sad and sorrowful."

He wondered if the woman and her daughter had caught any of the conversation that had passed between himself and the Rajah. It would all be repeated if that were so.

"Then it is known in the palace. Is it also known that his Highness will drive with me in the motor this afternoon?" he asked. An admission would reveal the fact that their words had been overheard.

"That also is known," she said, with a barefaced effrontery which took his breath away. "If your honour doubts my word, let him look through the open door of the dressing servants' room." She pointed down the verandah of the Rajah's rooms. "He will see them brushing the long English coat that his Highness wears only when he rides in the horseless carriage."

The triumphant note in her voice was even more irritating than the revelation of knowledge that could only have been gained by systematic spying and eaves-dropping. He felt that his temper was fast slipping away from control.

"That will do. You can go," he said shortly.

She took no notice of the order, but continued in an insinuating manner—

"Whilst your honour is driving with his Highness there will be perhaps a time for speaking about the marriage. Advice may be given and praise bestowed upon the chosen bride. If his thoughts are brought to dwell frequently upon her qualities, desire will be created; and he will be filled with a longing to take her as his wife. Then will he consent to do as his four honourable mothers wish."

"Go! I have nothing to do with his Highness's marriage."

"The Presence thinks much of what the honourable writer sahib says."

"Go!"

"His Highness thinks still more of what the missie sahib says."

"That will do. Go! or I will call the guard to turn you out."

"Your honour will not forget," said the old woman, unmoved by threat or command.

"Take the ruby to your mistresses and be off."

She shrank back in well-simulated protest. "The ruby must remain here. Doubtless your honour, in fulfilling the wishes of the Ranees in this matter of persuading the Maharajah, will feel able to keep the stone. All services should be rewarded——"

He made a sudden movement of impatience which alarmed her, and she dared not say more. With her body bent and her fingers touching her forehead, she retreated, satisfied that she had delivered the message in its entirety with which she had been charged.

Ted stood by his table staring at the ruby. It was one of the finest he had ever seen. He was perplexed more than a little to know what he should do with it. To retain it was impossible. How could he return it and at the same time convey the information to the Ranees that his assistance was not to be bought? It could only be done through the Rajah.

Picking it up, he went towards the private rooms. Usually it had been sufficient for all purposes to meet in the secretary's office or in the bungalow; and he had no occasion to intrude on his privacy.

Guards stood before the door of the sitting-room. Ted sent in his request, and immediately the door was flung open, and he was told to enter.

The Rajah threw down a roll of unmounted photographs

upon the table. Apparently he had been amusing himself by studying them. They were mostly done by amateurs of single figures, dogs, horses, and groups of men and women at various social gatherings. Among them were several taken at Dersingham Court with Ted and Delphine figuring in them. Which particular picture he had been looking at it was impossible to say. With another matter uppermost in his mind the secretary did not trouble himself to consider.

"Sorry to disturb your Highness."

"All right, Dersingham. I'm always glad to see you. What is it?"

"I have just received this—from the Ranees."

He displayed the ruby. The Rajah glanced at it and then at Ted's face.

"Is that your first experience of the Ranees'—kindness? he asked in a tone that was not free from curiosity.

"I don't look upon it as a kindness," replied Ted, bluntly. "Yes; my first, and I hope my last; for I don't like it."

"Judging from your expression, I take it that you regard it more as an insult than a kindness."

"I do, Rajah; I do. It's nothing more nor less than an attempt to bribe me!"

The genuine horror in Ted's voice made the Rajah smile; but for all the smile there was a shadow upon his brow that was uncommonly like a frown of displeasure.

"They want your support in their scheme to marry me to the Dewan's daughter."

"You are quick in discovering their machinations."

"Bred and born in the zenana, there is not much going on within its walls that I cannot fathom."

"What am I to do with it?" asked Ted, looking at the offending gem as if it were a noisome insect.

"Keep it by all means," replied the Rajah, promptly.

"I couldn't possibly keep it," answered Ted, with something approaching indignation at the thought of such a proceeding. The Rajah did not seem to understand the seriousness of it all, nor the offence that lay behind the action of the Ranees. "Your Highness pays me to serve you, and I give you my service. My time is entirely yours; it is not to be purchased by any one else. How am I to convince the Ranees that I am not to be bought; that I am not in the market; and that I can't serve them?"

"You can't convince them."

"Not if I return the jewel, as I certainly intend to do, to-morrow?"

"Your rejection of their gift will convey only one meaning—that you definitely refuse to help them and intend to range yourself on my side and oppose them."

"They must be aware that your marriage is a matter in which I have no part, no interest."

"They do not hold that opinion. May I advise you?"

"I shall be more than glad if you will tell me what I had better do."

"Thank them for their gift. Listen to all they have to say, and impress the fact upon them that you require time to think over the important arguments they have laid before you. This will satisfy them without committing you to any course."

"I would rather tell them the truth at once—that I will not interfere."

"Absolutely useless," replied the Rajah, with a touch of impatience at the obstinacy of the Englishman and his uncompromising attitude. "They won't believe you for a moment, however much you may assure them to the contrary."

"What else can they think?"

"That I have paid a higher price for your partisanship, and they will regard you as an enemy."

"How can I be an enemy?" asked Ted, incredulously. "All I desire is to serve you and be of use to you, in return for which you pay me handsomely. I have no wish to meddle with matters that do not concern me; and your marriage is a matter which has nothing to do with me."

Ted spoke clearly and decisively, and again their eyes met.

"It is beyond the bounds of belief that any man in India can confine himself strictly to the performance of his own duties," said the Rajah, "or even perform those duties in a disinterested manner. He cannot fail to put his fingers in other pies, given the opportunity. India is as the Hindu gods have made it, and you've got to take it at that."

"Isn't it possible to teach the people of the East that our ways are different from theirs?"

"Men have tried to do so, and are still trying. For my own sake, I should prefer you to refrain from making any attempt in that direction. Let Harlesden reform Shivapore—if he can. I have my reason for this."

"You don't want too much reformation?"

"I don't want to lose you, Dersingham," said the Rajah, in a low tense voice that showed how much he was moved. He continued almost in a whisper, "Didn't I tell you not half an hour ago that you are the only friend I have? I can't spare you. If you run counter to the zenana and make enemies there, it means that you—will have to go."

The last words were barely audible, yet they penetrated the brain of the Englishman with deep meaning.

"I would not go, unless, of course, you yourself asked me to go."

"I should ask you, because, as I tell you yet once again, you are the only friend I have in the world; because if you stayed you would die. By all the gods of my ancestors,

I speak the truth. Live in peace with all men and women if you can, and use every means, every device to accomplish it so that I may have you with me. By Krishna! I should die if I had to live here alone, the centre of duplicity and intrigue."

In the pause that followed he grew calmer, and regained control over himself. Ted gazed at him with the sympathy born of long-standing goodfellowship. He was beginning to understand that the path of an eastern prince is set with many slippery places. Harlesden himself, with all his diplomatic experience, failed to understand how great were these pitfalls, and how difficult it was to steer clear of them.

"I will stay with you, Narayan, for old sake's sake, until you yourself say go. I'll follow your advice in dealing with the Ranees, and will adopt a policy of silence. If they ask me to give any promises, I must put them off somehow."

"I don't think that they will do that at present. You must be prepared for further gifts. Receive them graciously and pass them on to me if you really don't feel able to stick to them yourself. I ought to thank you for the way you have behaved, but I know you won't like it."

"No; I shan't like it," replied Ted.

The other held out his hand, and Ted gripped it instantly. They were standing close together in the centre of the large room. The tramp of the sentry outside and the monotonous chant of the coppersmith barbet in the neem trees beyond were the only sounds besides the faint tick of a clock upon the writing-table. At this moment an attendant in the royal livery appeared in the doorway, bowing almost to the ground. Ted drew away, dropping the hand he held, whilst the Rajah turned and asked sharply—

"What is it?"

"His Excellency the Dewan prays that he may speak with the Presence."

"I will see him."

"At what hour will the Presence grant the audience?"

"In ten minutes time." As the man retired the Rajah added, "You see how news travels. He has already heard that I am going out this afternoon and will not be able to grant him an audience as I promised. I shall find him as unwilling to take a refusal as the Ranees."

"If you stand firm yourself, your refusal ought to carry weight."

"It would in your country; but India is not England, a fact many of your English politicians seem in danger of forgetting."

"With your Highness's permission, I will take my leave," said Ted, dropping back into the formality of the palace life.

"All right; you will call for me at three."

The Rajah was alone. He took up the ruby and examined it. Unlocking a large cash-box standing on his table, he dropped the stone into one of the divisions. The secretary so far had proved incorruptible. Not a man in Shivapore except Ted's own countrymen would have believed it possible. It was proof to the Rajah that he had a friend worthy of the name, though the issue in this case was not of much consequence. Still, if a similar case occurred where the issue should be of vital account, the Rajah felt sure that his secretary's action would be the same. He could not be bribed to do anything that was contrary to the dictates of conscience.

Virtues of this kind were at a discount in Shivapet. There were many ways of ridding the country of troublesome people—poison, accident, infection from diseases: a more common means of disposing of an enemy in the East than is imagined and less easy of detection than arsenic and datura.

"Lucky sovereign who rules over a nation of men like Dersingham!" was the Rajah's comment as he sank into his chair; a remark showing that his knowledge of the foreign land in which he had spent so much of his youth was after all only partial. Englishmen were not all made after the pattern of Ted Dersingham.

CHAPTER XVI.

Delphine frequently spent the morning in the garden from seven to nine o'clock. There was plenty to amuse and occupy her among the plants. With three men to do her bidding she was able to accomplish all that was possible in an Indian garden. Shivapet possessed a sub-tropical climate that widened horticultural possibilities.

A rose pergola and a fern house had been erected at the further end, near a large banyan tree, and here she often sat, sheltered from the fierce rays of the sun. The butterflies and birds were a constant source of pleasure to her country-loving nature.

It did not take her long to find means of communicating with her gardeners, men ready and willing enough, if not particularly learned in their calling. Daniel or the ayah served as interpreters. One or the other was never very far away when the young mistress chose to go among her flowers. The excuse for their presence was to hold the umbrella, to interpret, to move the chair on which she sat as she superintended the men.

Peter, the dog, was her faithful companion, and often playfellow; for Delphine had not outgrown her love for an occasional romp. The little dog had been taught many tricks, and she continued his education. As gold is the end of every man's desire, so sugar seemed to be the end of Peter's desire. He would do anything within the bounds of canine intelligence for the reward of a lump of sugar.

She taught him to play hide-and-seek, and they had fine games among the palms and pots of foliage plants on cool, breezy mornings that suggested a little healthy exercise. She ran away to hide, and Peter, held by the ayah, was released to find her. She often smiled to see how he sniffed and hunted in impossible places suitable only for a mouse to take cover. The games were not confined to the garden. They proved equally fascinating in the house when time hung heavy on her hands, or a suspicion of home-sickness oppressed her.

Breakfast was over, and Ted had departed to the palace. By ten the sun was too hot to tempt her out again ; but at this time of the year the breeze was sufficiently cool to make the verandah the pleasantest place in the house for reading, working, or writing. It opened into the drawing-room, where the yellow roses were renewed almost daily. The verandah was raised four feet above the ground outside and railed in by a handsome balustrade of masonry. Crotons, dracænas, palms, and panax in pots, formed a bank of green against the pilasters.

Delphine had drawn her chair and the little table she was using close to the balustrade. Her work-basket rested on the stone coping, having had to give place to bundles of patterns received from Calcutta. As she turned the bundles over and scrutinized them, she threw them on the floor as rejected. A few were replaced on the table to be further considered by-and-bye. At the request of the Rajah she was choosing the tapestry for the lounges in the ballroom, and she was doing it by a process of elimination.

The chant of palanquin-bearers roused her from her occupation. She had heard it often enough to know that it was the song of the men belonging to the house of Gopaula Bahadur. Rising from her chair, she went to the top of the steps under the portico to greet her visitor. The trusted

man, without whom Royama never went out, pulled aside the curtains and helped her to alight. Having seen his mistress safe with the English lady, he withdrew, accompanied by the bearers, and went round to the back of the house to wait under one of the tamarind trees until he should be summoned.

"You have come just in time to give me your advice," said Delphine, after she and Royama had exchanged greetings. "The Rajah has asked me to choose the tapestry for the ballroom. I have rejected all those on the floor which has lessened the number considerably. What do you think of this?"

They discussed the patterns, gradually putting aside this one and that until they were reduced to four. These were reserved for the Rajah's final decision.

"What have you been doing with yourself the last few days, Royama?" asked Delphine, as they settled down for a chat, after the manner of girls all over the world.

"I have paid another visit to the Ranees. Each time I go they make me promise to return. I have to amuse them just as if they were children."

"Are they more reconciled to your having broken your purdah?"

"I think they have forgotten all about it. I come and go just as if I were purdanasheen. They know nothing of how I pay a visit to you; and I have given all their spies handsome presents, so no further tales are carried. These matters are easily arranged if one sets to work in proper fashion."

"Your methods in this country are very different from ours," said Delphine, with a laugh. "Are the Ranees still keen on the dolls?"

"As keen as pepper, as your brother puts it."

"Mustard, you mean."

"It doesn't matter which. Their latest scheme is to have

a doll's wedding. They want to marry the one that wears the evening dress. I am having a bridegroom doll dressed by a tailor at my house, and my mother, who is a clever cook, is going to make the wedding-cake."

"The actual ceremony will not be easy for you."

"I shall manage it all right," replied Royama, with confidence. "They are too ignorant to be able to detect any mistake."

"It would be easier to make the party a ball or a reception."

"Their minds are running on weddings just now, and they can think of nothing else. The Rajah's marriage is never out of their thoughts."

Peter had seized the opportunity of his mistress's idleness to establish himself on her lap. Delphine bent over the little dog, and gently pulled his ear.

"I understand that the Rajah has refused their choice," she said, without looking up.

"His Highness may refuse as often as he pleases; but they will get their way."

"How can they, if he is determined not to marry?"

"When the women of the zenana decide upon the marriage of one of the members of the family, there is no rest, no peace, until it is carried out. The Ranees are determined."

Delphine laughed incredulously.

"The Rajah has lived long enough in England to claim his right of choice, and to obtain it. I am sure he has too strong a will to be forced into anything against his own judgment."

Her faith in him was almost convincing, but not quite sufficient to alter Royama's opinion. The dark-brown eyes dwelt upon the face of the English girl as she bent over the dog in her lap. There was trouble in their depths.

"I hope he may stand firm; but, oh! Delphine! You

English people don't know the strength of the zenana. It is like the strength of a long, thin snake, whose limp body may be taken up in the palm of the hand and bent at will, but whose coils prove stronger than the strongest rope."

Delphine tossed her head up with contempt and disbelief.

"How can those four purdanasheen women compel a man against his will?"

"The little nut-bird penetrates into the heart of the strongest tree of the forest by constant tapping, though its beak is no harder than my thumb-nail. Already they have begun to tap in the zenana."

"How?"

"In this way. See here what they have given me."

She pointed to a diamond solitaire earring screwed into the upper part of her ear. It sparkled and showed itself to be no mean gift.

"That was probably presented to you because of all your kindness to them."

"My kindness was not the reason. The talk that went before the giving of the diamond was all about His Highness; the necessity of his marriage before he goes to Simla for the hot weather next year; the suitability of their choice of the Dewan's daughter. The senior Ranee said that all would come right if he could be persuaded. It was necessary to praise the girl in his hearing. His nobles should praise her. The writing sahib and his sister should praise her. My father should praise her. Then the diamond was given, and I understood why."

"Have you seen the Dewan's daughter?"

"My mother and I paid her a visit yesterday."

"What is she like?"

"A good little child with gentle manners. She was too frightened to speak, but her mother spoke for her."

"Do you think that she would make the Rajah a suitable wife?"

Delphine's eyes were fixed upon her guest with sharp inquiry. Peter moved uneasily; he felt injured at the deflection of her attention.

"Not what you English call suitable," replied Royama, readily.

"If that is your opinion, you will not praise her or influence your father to do so?"

"Why should he not? His Highness will not marry at the bidding of my father."

"I should call the gift of the diamond nothing less than an attempt to bribe."

"Yes; that's what it is," acquiesced Royama, complacently.

An expression of surprise passed over Delphine's face as she said, with some heat—

"I should feel insulted if any one tried to bribe me."

"Not if you belonged to India. It is the custom of the country."

"I should return the presents if they were sent to me with any such intention," continued Delphine, not without indignation at the mere thought of such a thing.

"Then you would give needless offence, and perhaps raise enmity."

At this juncture, Peter suddenly jumped off Delphine's lap and barked furiously. They looked out into the garden, but could see nothing that was likely to raise his enmity.

"Bad dreams, little dog! That's what comes of being a greedy little pig!" said Delphine. "Sit up, sir, and show off your tricks."

Peter behaved admirably, and was duly rewarded. The programme was not finished, however, in the canine mind by trusting and dying for the Rajah. More sugar was to be extracted from his mistress after the exciting game of

hide-and-seek, and Peter barked his request till, in self-defence, Delphine ran off into the bungalow to hide. With ears cocked and one foot held up expectantly, the dog waited till she gave the call. Away he went, Royama after him, and they hunted through the house, through Delphine's rooms and Ted's rooms and out into the back verandah. Arriving at the store-room, Peter promptly sat up and whined before it until Delphine emerged, laughing, and with a lump of sugar in her fingers.

"Isn't he clever? He understands the game so thoroughly that now there is no need to hold him. Come back into the verandah. I hear the motor-horn, which means that Ted has returned."

To their surprise, the Rajah appeared with Ted.

"We have come to look at the patterns, Delphie," said Ted. "If we decide at once I can get the stuff down in time to have the ballroom finished for the levee."

His sister seated herself at the table, and, calling Royama to help, she pointed out the stuffs that seemed most suitable. After some discussion, a choice was made.

"Cut off a piece, Delphie," said Ted, who was in a hurry to catch a post that went out at midday.

"You are requested not to cut the patterns," she replied.

"Oh, bother requests! I can't wait for the patterns to go back by parcel post. I must enclose a piece in my letter."

Delphine's work-basket still stood upon the balustrade, where she had placed it. She rose to get her scissors. A cry startled the company.

"Ted! Ted! Look here! Here's another scorpion!"

Royama flew to her side at the sound of her cry, and seized her by the arm to hold her back.

"Take care! Oh, Delphine! take care! Yes; it's a scorpion!"

Ted and the Rajah also drew near, and it was the Rajah who lifted it gingerly by the tail from among the cotton reels, where it was sprawling rather helplessly, and carried it out into the garden; he crushed it with a stone. It was all over in less than a minute, and the Rajah was back again with them as if nothing had happened. Royama, after her warning, was very quiet, and the eyes that were lifted to the Rajah's had in them a question, behind which lay fear. It was Ted who spoke.

"You mustn't be afraid of scorpions or snakes in this country. You must be careful, Delphie, that's all."

"Horrid creatures! I suppose the sting is not fatal. All the same, I shouldn't like to be stung."

She gave a little expressive shudder as she took the basket from its position warily, as though she feared to find a second.

"It is not as bad as the bite of a snake, I am told," said her brother. "But the sting of a scorpion is a serious matter. Besides being very painful, Dr. Constable tells me that it may produce a kind of blood-poisoning if you happen to be out of health."

"I know it would make me ill. A bee-sting upsets me. I am afraid I should be tempted to run away from you, Ted, if your house was infested. I wonder where this one came from."

"Dropped from the roof, or crawled up from the pots of crotons on the other side of the balustrade."

"This is the second we have found. I was nearly stung yesterday, in the garden, by one that had climbed up into the back of my chair. Is it the season for them, Rajah?"

He had not spoken while the brother and sister talked. As she turned her eyes upon him, she caught a grave look, that made her add—

"I am not hurt. You need not take it seriously."

"I should be very much distressed if you were hurt,

Miss Dersingham," he answered. "I look upon you as my guest, although you live with your brother, and I hold myself responsible for your well-being."

She laughed as she replied, "I couldn't possibly hold you responsible for the accidental sting of an insect, Rajah."

"Couldn't you?" he said, looking into her eyes. "Let me repeat in any case, your brother's advice. You must be careful. Shake your clothes before putting them on, and look at your chair before you touch it."

"Surely they are not as plentiful as that! I have been here more than a month, and these are the first we have found."

"Two in two days," said Royama, as she again met the Rajah's swift glance.

"Give me the scissors, Delphie. I want to write that letter to Calcutta before the noonday post goes."

She found and handed them to her brother, who cut off a portion of the chosen pattern and departed to his room to write. The Rajah and Royama, at Delphine's invitation, sat down again.

"You have been with the Ranees lately, Miss Gopaula. It is very good of you to amuse them as you do."

At that moment the subject of the zenana was in the minds of both.

"My father is pleased to allow me to go. They do not keep their kindness only for me. They are equally good to the Dewan's little daughter."

Delphine listened with curiosity, wondering how Royama would bring in a laudation of the girl without a breach of good breeding. The Rajah replied easily.

"I know she goes to see them; but she is not able to amuse them."

"Your Highness is aware that it is not always the most witty who are best beloved. The daughter of the Dewan is a most loveable child."

He smiled as he listened, and Delphine could not fail to observe from his manner that Royama had said nothing that made either of them uncomfortable. Apparently he understood the wire-pulling, and no offence was given. The diamond earring was fairly earned. In the midst of her contemplation he turned suddenly to her, and asked—

"What would you say, Miss Dersingham, if your mother proposed to marry your brother to a little girl of eleven?"

"I should say—'skittles'!"

He greeted her slang with a good laugh, in which they all joined. It came out spontaneously, and reminded him of other days.

"You have not arrived at the compulsory mating of educated men with ignorant children in England," he said.

"On the contrary, modern tastes show a tendency to raise the age to a period when a woman can in no sense claim to be a girl. Among other reasons for this may be counted the desire for congenial companionship."

Before he could reply, Royama rose with an exclamation.

"Ah! I had nearly forgotten!"

"What have you forgotten?" asked Delphine.

"My mother made a dish of sweets for you, as you wished to taste some that were home-made. I have left them in the palanquin."

Delphine called Daniel and explained, telling him to bring them in. Royama followed the pariah butler into the dining-room.

"Do not touch. Tell my head bearer to bring the parcel."

It was a case of caste again, and Daniel understood. She went on to the back verandah, where she waited for her servant, a man of her own caste. Meanwhile, the conversation was continued in the room she had left.

"Yes; I know that men marry in England for congenial companionship. It was the case with some of my

College friends. Sometimes I feel as if I could give up my State and revenues for the inestimable gift of English birth, and the privileges that are attached to it; above all, for liberty to choose my wife myself."

He looked at her, but she did not reply immediately. She was thinking over his words.

"Perhaps your choice might be unfortunate. Englishmen are not always accepted when they offer themselves," she said, presently.

His eyes fired with the light of a courage incapable of admitting defeat, and he rejoined, with warmth—

"You think I should fail? I know that I should not when once I had determined to succeed."

The colour in her cheek deepened, but it was not because she was displeased at his royal arrogance. The stronger the man, the greater the admiration of the woman. It is the arrogance of the weak that she despises.

"Is it not possible to exercise equal liberty as a Hindu?" she asked.

He sprang to his feet, flaming suddenly into passion.

"Have you ever seen a tiger netted?" he asked, fiercely. "No; of course you have not. Your country does not produce tigers. It knows nothing of the awful struggles, the useless, exhausting, heart-breaking efforts made by the animal to break loose from the cruel meshes of the impenetrable net."

He placed his hands upon the table and leaned across towards her.

"Delphine," he said, in low, vibrating tones that trembled and unconsciously using the name that had often been on his lips when he was a schoolboy. "I am meshed round with caste and custom. I struggle, only to wear myself out and break my heart. Who can help me? Who can save me from giving up the fight and sinking back into the groove in which my father lived and died?"

The despair of the cry went straight to her woman's heart, and the fount of her sympathy opened its flood-gates.

"Can I?" she asked, her soul in her eyes.

Before he could reply, the tinkle of anklets warned them that Royama was returning. Delphine dropped back into her seat, and the Rajah strode down the length of the verandah towards the room where his secretary sat making out the order for the Calcutta firm of upholsterers.

Royama glanced from one to the other with the intuitive perception of her sex. What had happened between them in that short minute whilst she was absent? A tiny pin-prick, an intangible arrow of jealousy stirred within her. Reserved, sedate, she might be; but she was eastern-born of a hot-blooded race, and below the surface lay unsuspected depths of emotion capable of cyclonic disturbance should the storm be raised. What had the Rajah said to cause the English rose to grow in Delphine's cheek? What had she said to send the Rajah tramping like a caged tiger down the length of the verandah? The glance, swift and comprehensive, did not linger. Emotion was as quickly mastered and hidden, and it was with a calm voice that she spoke.

"Here are the sweets, Delphine. I hope you will like them."

She opened a dainty box in which they had been arranged, and, with a pair of bon-bon tongs, picked out one for Delphine.

"Usually, mother makes them with more butter; but I told her that the English people prefer them sugary and less rich than we are accustomed to have them."

"It is excellent," said Delphine, as she took another, offered in similar fashion.

By this time the Rajah had recovered from the little outburst into which he had been betrayed, and he strolled

back to the seat he had occupied. Royama shyly presented her box.

"Will your Highness honour my mother by tasting one of her sweets?"

She chose one for him, as she had chosen for Delphine and he accepted it without hesitation.

"Very good, Miss Gopaula. Tell your mother that her sweets are better than any I have tasted in the palace."

Apparently he was sincere, for he accepted a second. When Ted appeared, Royama would have tempted him too, but he refused.

"I've just been smoking a cigarette," he said, by way of excuse.

"You English people don't love sweets as we do. We have fewer meals than you, but we make up for it by eating sweets and betel-nut in between."

A few minutes later the Rajah said, "I'm ready, Dersingham, if you are." He turned to Delphine. "By-the-bye, you asked me just now if it was the season for scorpions. I think it is likely to be, therefore you must be careful how you touch and handle anything in which it is possible for them to hide."

"You may be sure I shall be careful. How long does the season last for the horrid things?"

"It is always uncertain. It depends on——"

He paused as once again he caught Royama's eye.

"The weather?" asked Delphine.

"Well—yes—the weather—and other circumstances."

"Good-bye, Rajah. We meet again to-morrow night," said Delphine, as she leaned on the balustrade to watch his departure.

At her words he stopped and turned.

"You will see me; but I speak to no one."

"Not even to me?"

"Not even to you, Miss Dersingham. It is forbidden by the temple people, who manage the ceremony."

"They can't forbid me to look at you," she said, rebelliously.

"No; I suppose that is allowable," he replied dreamily, his eyes resting on the colour that resembled the sweet foreign flowers his cleverest gardeners could not grow with any success at the palace.

"Then I shall look," she said, with a faint echo of a challenge in her voice, as the door of the electric brougham closed upon him.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE private ceremonies—of a strictly religious character—had been performed. They were dull and sometimes degrading to the mind of the central figure ; but the Rajah submitted with the resignation of a fatalist. Less degrading but scarcely less tedious, were the public ceremonies. The oaths were taken, and the investiture accomplished amidst a gorgeous display of dress and jewels, cloth of gold and brilliant colour, dust and sunshine, and His Highness, the Rajah of Shivapore, was at last fully established on the throne of his fathers.

There remained two more functions to be carried out, one of a religious character, the other of the nature of a levee, corresponding with the ceremony of kissing hands at a European Court. The first was purely oriental and heathen, and had no counterpart out of the East. The Rajah, clothed in royal robes of State, and wearing sacred ashes on his forehead, was to pass in procession before his nobles in company with a number of pujaris from the big temple. Sacred fire kindled at the lamp burning constantly before the idol, would be carried by the temple people. During the evening, through the rites performed by the pujaris, the divine afflatus would be considered by all orthodox Hindus to rest on the person of the Rajah.

In the breast of every Hindu in Shivapet this condition—incomprehensible to the ordinary Englishman—awoke feelings of awe and veneration. It did not suggest assumption

or impiety. Without being derogatory to the majesty of the deity, it was believed that the divine spirit entered at the request of the pujaris, any object animate or inanimate, chosen by them.

There were times when the images in the great temples in the south were thus invested. Sadhus, through the virtue of their rites and asceticism, brought the afflatus upon themselves. The mahunt of the temple was sometimes invested with it. Wherever it resided, there the deepest reverence was shown. The subject never so far forgot himself as to take the adoration to his human self. His own personality was sunk during the time that he was the chosen ark of the deity. The worship was directed towards the inward unseen divinity. It was not intended for the outward visible humanity. For the man to accept the adoration with acknowledgement would be presumptuous. The smallest indication of consciousness, of appreciation, the slightest sign of gratification on his part, would be disrespectful to the divine afflatus, and liable to provoke punishment.

Of the Hindu doctrine of the divine afflatus, Delphine knew nothing, and, had she known, would probably have cared little. No one attempted to explain—least of all the Rajah himself—that for a few hours her friend Narayan intended to pose as the ark of the Deity. She would have received the information with scorn and incredulous laughter. He! her old friend! a public school and 'Varsity man! a good all-round sportsman! He pose as a god! and receive in his person the adoration due to a god! Impossible! "Skittles!" would have been her expression.

Her brother had not been long enough in the country to comprehend the circumstances. He had purposely held aloof from all religious ceremony—with the Rajah's willing consent—feeling that his services were not required, and

that he would be wise to keep out of matters he did not understand. The rest of the Europeans resident in Shivapet had learned something of the real facts. They accepted them as they accepted polygamy and other practices of the people among whom they were obliged to live, without comment or criticism, and without any apparent consciousness of the existence of such practices. They were not asked to participate in any religious rite or identify themselves with any religious belief. They went as spectators, and their presence was accepted as a sign of their goodwill towards the reigning prince.

The durbar hall was lighted with electric light for the first time, and presented a wonderful appearance in the eyes of the assembled company. The old oil lamps, dim and smoky, had done little towards illuminating the building. In their imperfect light the richness of the wood carving was lost, and the marvellous wall painting, prolific in design and lavish in colour, only dimly discernible. Under the power of electricity, the elaborate wood-work and paintings were seen clearly in all their beauty.

At the end of the hall was a raised dais, upon which was placed a throne for the Rajah and seats for his guests. Scarlet cloth was spread everywhere. The chairs had been covered with red plush and regilded. The silk curtains of the women's gallery had been renewed, and the latticed screen gilded.

It was a gay scene as far as light and colour were concerned. The dress of the court fitted in with the recent decorations of the hall. Cloth of gold and silver, embroidery, satin and velvet of superb texture were to be seen on all sides. The display of jewels was equally magnificent. Under the electric light, diamond, ruby and emerald revealed new beauties that astonished even the owners of the gems. The lights "devil's wickless candles,"

as the lower orders called both gas and electricity, were a constant source of surprise and admiration to the company.

The Dewan did the honours in the absence of the Rajah, and received the guests on the steps of the dais. The nobles, not having emancipated their women, were unaccompanied by wives and daughters. Sons, nephews, and more distant relatives accompanied each head of a family, though they might have neither position nor wealth. The only native lady present was Royama. If there were others, they were with the Ranees behind the screen.

The Europeans naturally gathered together in a little group. Royama joined them, looking eagerly for Mrs. Constable, who was ever ready to extend a guardian wing to the girl in her strange solitude. It required a large amount of courage for a refined Hindu lady to face the critical eyes of her fellow-countrymen. She would often have remained behind on these occasions, her courage failing her at the last moment; but her father insisted on her appearance in public now and then, fearing lest she should insensibly fall back into the purdah custom, and be unable to break it again.

Harlesden arrived at half-past eight, and greeted the Dewan with his usual courtesy.

"You must be glad that the ceremonies of induction are over, Dewan Bahadur. I congratulate you on their success."

"I am pleased to hear that your excellency considers them successful. The task has not been an easy one."

"In what way?" asked the Political Officer.

"His Highness has been absent so long from his country that he has forgotten many of his father's customs. Among others, he has forgotten how to wear our national dress. He is too fond of your English clothes. There is nothing royal about white flannel and dark-blue serge. Serge is the material used for the syces and peons uniforms."

"Dress does not matter if the wearer behaves like a prince."

"A noble bearing may help to make the prince, but it must be supported by suitable clothes. His Highness has not the princely presence of his father."

"I don't agree with you," said the Resident. "To my mind the Rajah bears himself with a dignity and nobility to which his father never attained."

The Dewan showed by a gesture that he was not in agreement with the speaker's sentiments.

"His Highness is too mild, too gracious, too much like a common person. When one of his subjects asks for an interview, he consents immediately, instead of putting difficulties in the way."

"Why should he create difficulties when there are none?"

"To make the final granting of the favour seem greater and therefore more gratifying to the suppliant. When the appointment is made—with such ease that it is not appreciated—and the suppliant for favours enters his presence, His Highness sees him punctually to the minute, instead of keeping him waiting. What respect and awe can a prince command who is so easy of access?"

The Dewan's voice held genuine concern, as he detailed the shortcomings of his prince.

"In my eyes," said Harlesden, "punctuality and courtesy to all alike are two virtues that should be found in all rulers, Dewan Bahadur."

The Prime Minister was not to be convinced.

"They are what we expect to find in Englishmen; but in our Maharajah we should prefer more haughtiness, more pride, more wrath on occasions."

"Wrath? He has been taught to keep his temper, not to show it."

"It is incumbent on the true prince, who desires to

retain the respect of his people, to show his wrath when he is offended. It creates a good impression on others when one who fails in the performance of his duty is driven forth from the Presence with contempt and ignominy. In former days those who gave offence were crushed to death under the foot of an elephant kept for that purpose."

Harlesden smiled, yet he was not altogether satisfied to hear such sentiments put forward in these later days of progress and advancement, and he said—

"It might have been so in the old days, but under a beneficent government we have changed all that."

"More is the pity, Excellency; more is the pity," replied the conservative old man. "It would save much trouble to those in power if you did make use of an elephant now and then. Many a troublesome noble, who had grown too rich and presumptuous, was got rid of in that way. Nobles can always be created, but once created there is no means of ridding the State of them except by the tread of elephants, or some such device."

The arrival of a party of native gentlemen diverted the attention of the Dewan. Harlesden turned to Dr. Constable, who, with Wythall, the Commissioner of Police, and Mrs. Wythall, stood near, listening with some amusement to the remarks of Shivapore's Prime Minister.

"There's a grain of truth in the Dewan's theory," said Wythall. "Rank imperialism is what India wants. The people cannot understand our democratic system. Equality is a fearsome doctrine to them, cutting at the root of caste, as it does. They are terrified at it."

"Democratic ideas are new in this country, too new for us to judge whether they will prove acceptable," said Dr. Constable, who had been longer in India than either Harlesden or Wythall.

"I agree with Wythall to a certain extent," said Harlesden. "The people of a Native State, like Shivapore,

do not understand our system of government. They cling to the tradition of royalty, and look for the traditional attitude handed down to them by their ancestors. Their instinctive desire is to be ruled by an aristrocatic power, holding itself responsible to no inferior authority. The idea of representative government does not appeal to peasant or noble. They distrust the system just as they distrust the individual. Moreover, to consult the will of the people is contrary to inherited instinct."

"Yet that is what some of the more advanced are clamouring for," said Constable.

"It is often the smallest dog that barks loudest. The agitators of the present day are but a fraction of India's millions, and they are not to be found in Native States."

"I wonder what Shivapore would say to a Labour Member?" said the Doctor.

"That nothing short of the elephant's foot would adequately dispose of him," rejoined Wythall, lightly.

"In my opinion," said Harlesden, who took all subjects connected with the government of India seriously, "we are doing our best when we give the people a ruler like the present Rajah—a man who has had all the advantages of a liberal education in England. With his experience, and the inherent loyalty of his subjects, he ought to be able to introduce all necessary reforms."

"Talking of reforms. Have you heard of the bobbery that has been made over the municipal reforms?" asked Wythall.

"I was told that you had had a little trouble in the town," said Harlesden, slightly taken aback.

"What was it about?" asked Constable.

"The new rule that has lately been passed, that every householder should keep his premises clean and in a sanitary condition," said Wythall.

"Not before it was needed!" remarked Constable, who was perennially agitating for sanitary reform.

"A public dustman was suggested who should go round with his cart; but he was objected to on the score of caste. It was agreed that the townsmen should do their own cleansing, each man providing his own scavenger."

"The plan ought to have worked all right," said Harlesden, who had himself recommended it to the Rajah's Council.

"It worked all right as far as the cleaning up of back yards was concerned," said Wythall. "But the caste people, the silk weavers, goldsmiths, and others, refused to go as far as the waste ground outside the town. They dumped their refuse in the pariah quarter. The pariahs, who were responsible for their portion of the town, were annoyed, and there was a riot. The odd part about it is, we cannot make the caste people understand that the pariahs have any right to object to the proceeding. The weavers, who are the most truculent, have threatened to beat the pariahs and burn their houses, because, in their opinion, they are getting too uppish."

"It keeps you busy," said Dr. Constable.

"Yes; I've had to picket men round the pariah quarter to keep the peace. I wish the authorities would go a bit slower."

"It's a case of patience and perseverance," said Constable. "We shall teach them to regard individual rights in time, and to accept representative government, sanitation, and the whole bag of tricks in a proper spirit."

"By the aid of the native ruler," added Harlesden.

"Poor chap!" said Wythall. "I pity him, whoever he may be. He stands between two fires—his council of conservative nobles holding him back on one side, and a paramount power with increasing democratic tendencies

hustling him forward on the other. If I were the Rajah here, I should cut and run. I could never serve two masters. I'm not sure he hasn't got three, with that pretty girl's critical eye upon him. Talk of an angel! Here she comes."

CHAPTER XVIII.

Delphine wore a dress of soft white material, draped with a still more diaphanous fabric, besprinkled with crystal points It was innocent of colour, and without a vestige of gold or jewel or even flowers. The shimmering frock, mist-like in its purity, made her a remarkable figure among the kaleidescope tints of native dress. The eyes of the nobles dwelt upon her with a lingering gaze of curiosity. She had appeared on horseback, and in car and carriage; but they had never before seen her in evening dress. Accustomed as they were to drape their women from head to foot, she presented a strange sight to them.

The day had been dull and monotonous for her, as neither the Rajah nor Ted had been able to ride. She might have gone alone, but as it meant passing through the town she decided against it, and contented herself with a walk in the palace grounds. Walking in India has not much fascination for the European. The beaten tracks are dusty or ankle-deep in mud, as the case may be; and the grass is full of strange insects, to say nothing of a possible snake. Since the plague of scorpions had manifested itself she had become nervous, fearing to find one wherever there was sufficient cover to hide it. She had been looking forward to the durbar, as it was called, all the afternoon. Though the Rajah might be inaccessible, she intended to find amusement among the guests for the couple of hours it would last. She greeted the little group of her countrymen with a flow of good spirits.

"How solemn you all look! Are you arranging a State funeral?" she asked. "If so, let it be for one of those dreadful old Ranees who are for ever sending for Ted."

"We were talking of the government of India," said Harlesden.

She laughed, as she answered lightly—

"The government of India will get on very well without talking about it. A watched kettle never boils. You are all much too serious. Look at that row of nobles sitting on the dais as solemn as judges! I feel horribly inclined to do a *pas seul* before them."

She caught at her draperies on each side as though preparing to carry out her threat.

"Don't be foolish!" counselled Mrs. Constable, startled for a moment by her exuberance of spirits.

"This is a very serious function, Miss Dersingham," said Harlesden, not without apprehension lest she should be tempted into some vagary that would scandalize the upper ten of Shivapore.

She did not in the least comprehend that the Resident could no more afford to be frivolous at such a function than the colonel on parade could be frivolous before the regiment. His anxiety to preserve a suitable decorum only provoked the youthful mischief within her, never far from the surface. Wythall's smile of amusement served as an excitement.

"Think, Mr. Harlesden, how delighted the Ranees would be! I know they are in the gallery, behind those curtains. They have never had a chance of seeing an Englishwoman dance. I really must waltz across the dais —only just once, up and down."

The expression on his face tempted her to still further extravagances. She put out a white-slippered foot, glistening like the frock with tiny crystals, and pointed her toe, swaying gracefully as she held her skirts.

"Delphine! Don't!" implored Mrs. Constable, in real alarm. "You must take this reception seriously, or the Dewan will be offended. We are here by his invitation."

"Do look at the gallery, Mr. Harlesden. By the way the curtains are moving I know the Ranees are frightfully excited!" She glanced up towards them, her face full of happy, heedless mirth. "Dear old things! I am sure they would enjoy it."

"Where's your brother?" asked the practical Doctor, by way of diverting her attention from perilous channels.

"Something was wrong with the gas at the palace, and he was sent for all in a hurry, as usual. Here he comes! He will be able to tell you about it himself."

Ted's opportune arrival happily diverted her attention from an impromptu dance on the dais to the story he had to tell, within which lay the reason for his belated appearance.

"Been in attendance on the Rajah?" asked Mrs. Constable.

"No. The Rajah, poor fellow! has been handed over body and soul to the purohits. I haven't seen him since lunch. He has had no ride to-day, nor any exercise."

"That's the worst of this palace life. He will be ill if he doesn't get exercise regularly, or he will grow fat, like his father," grumbled Dr. Constable.

"I get plenty!" remarked Ted, ruefully.

"What were you wanted for at the palace? Kettle boiled over in the zenana again?"

"It wasn't the Ranees this time. You know that we have just had both gas and electric light laid on. The gas is put into the servants' rooms, the passages, and along the verandahs, and down the carriage drive to the gateway. It seems that the servants and servants' servants—their name is legion—don't understand how a light can burn without a wick. The wire in the electric bulbs satisfies

them; but the gas jets show nothing that can be taken for a wick. They were convinced that our gas was the work of the devil. Wherever there is a devil it is the invariable practice of the Hindu to propitiate it. They have been propitiating our new gas devil by annointing all his wickless candles, as they call the jets, with some nasty, oily mess, made of butter and sugar. The pipes were choked, and not a burner would light this evening. At six o'clock I was sent for in a great hurry, and I had to get two or three workmen from the works to clean out the burners before we could set matters right. The whole place was plunged in darkness, as we have got rid of the old oil lamps."

"They keep things humming for us in the palace, don't they, Dersingham?" remarked Dr. Constable, with a humorous glance at his wife.

The company looked expectantly at Mrs. Constable, certain of a fresh story against her husband.

"Do tell us the latest. Another invalid kid?" said Harlesden.

"Not a kid this time, but a doll belonging to the third Ranee," she replied, with a twinkle in her eye.

"Measles, or whooping cough?" inquired Mrs. Wythall.

"Neither. It was suffering from acute pain in the limbs, from exposure, so the Ranee declared."

"Did your husband prescribe?"

"He entered into the case with a good nature worthy of a better cause—diagnosed it as one of severe dollacitis, and ordered a course of mustard and cayenne poultices."

"I hope the invalid is better."

"Stop a minute! I haven't finished my story. This happened in the morning. At three o'clock the Doctor received an urgent message from Royama to come to the palace at once. If she hadn't sent him a signed note herself, I am afraid he would have paid no attention. He

went off without delay, and Royama herself brought the patient to him."

"The doll?"

"No; a real live baby! It turned out that the third Ranee ordered up a child of one of her numerous servants, and made it a kind of whipping boy for her doll. It had been poulticed for the doll till it was a mass of blisters. If Royama had not rescued it, I think the little creature would have been killed. It is a lesson to the Doctor not to play up to the Ranees folly,—children that they are! There is a strain of monkeyish mischief in those grown-up women, that for all their childishness makes them something more than children to deal with."

"Poor little baby!" said Delphine to Royama. "Did it suffer much?"

"The mother, suspecting some queer pranks, gave it a dose of opium before she brought it; and, fortunately, it was too stupified to feel the pain. I have the baby at my house with the mother, and, under Dr. Constable's treatment, it will soon be well."

The Dewan approached with a request that they would take their seats, as the Rajah would shortly appear. Mrs. Constable had been present at many durbars and native gatherings, and she understood what was required. Leading the way, she seated herself on a chair a little distance from the throne, and signed to Delphine and Royama to sit near her. The seat next to the throne on one side was assigned to Harlesden. The nobles had already arranged themselves in strict order of precedence on the other side, the Dewan occupying the place of honour, corresponding to Harlesden's position. Next to him sat Gopaula, whose eyes frequently turned towards his daughter with pardonable pride.

The hum of voices ceased, and silence fell on the assembly. The flutter of silk in the darkened galleries

could be heard as the purdah crowd pressed close to the latticed screen.

Below the dais the hall was packed with men of lower rank, many of them wearing jewels and robes as fine as those displayed in the court circle. A passage was kept clear through them by means of red ropes. Drawn across the further end of the hall was a curtain guarded by a dozen fierce-looking horsemen in uniform. They were turbanned, booted, and spurred, and armed with pennoned lances. Many of them wore black beards, others had long black moustaches only. They stood motionless as the company assembled, taking no notice of the crowd that pressed closely round them.

Soon after the Europeans had seated themselves, a sound of native music was heard in the distance, and the sowars stood at attention. At a given signal, their hands were raised to the curtain. It was not drawn, but held aside, revealing a strange group beyond.

Foremost came four musicians, clothed in white muslin, and playing on reed pipes to the accompaniment of a tomtom. They trod a curious measure, each man slowly revolving as he moved, without breaking the quadruple formation. Continuing their double revolutions, they slowly progressed towards the dais.

Immediately behind walked the Rajah, a pujari on either side bearing aloft a brass pan of sacred fire. They were followed by a score of temple men clothed in white muslin, that had never been touched by scissors or needle. The drapery fell in soft folds over their shoulders and round their limbs, only partially hiding the brown skin, smooth as a well-coloured meerschaum pipe. Their heads were shaven and feet bare, and their only ornament was the rugged Brahmany bead necklace.

The appearance of the Rajah was remarkable for both the magnificence of his costume, and the stateliness of his

bearing. He wore a long, loose coat of richly embroidered purple velvet, reaching to his ankles. Upon it blazed a number of gems set as pendants, brooches, and necklaces. A broad collar of fine pearls encircled his throat. Bracelets, studded with large diamonds clumsily cut, were on his wrists; his waist was girdled with a wide belt of gold of the finest workmanship and encrusted with diamonds emeralds, and rubies. In the brilliant light he stood out in barbaric splendour among the crowd of white-robed pujaris a singular and striking figure.

Delphine stared with amazement. The display of jewels and the appearance of the pujaris was like nothing she had ever seen before; but what rivetted her attention beyond all else was the distinguishing mark of the god Shiva imprinted upon his forehead. The badge of his religion was drawn thickly and disfiguringly in sacred ashes, producing a strange effect, amounting almost to a disguise. She had observed the same kind of mark upon men in the streets of Shivapet. She was told they were sadhus (ascetics), individuals who had punctiliously performed their religious duties. She had regarded the mark much as she regarded the canonical dress of the English priest, being ignorant that the badge of Shiva was borne alike by the laity as well as by the men who devoted themselves exclusively to the service of the deity.

The effect of the mark thus heavily imprinted was to endow the Rajah with a new character. She had seen him pass through the town as its prince, and was becoming accustomed to his bearing. It hid for a time the genial unaffected friend of her English life; but when the town was passed, and the bodyguard left behind, the man, as she knew him beneath his royalty, reappeared.

As he stood revealed now, he was neither prince nor friend, but the heathen priest of a heathen people. Her mind revolted against the idea, and she found it impossible

to identify him with the Rajah Narayan she had known. The conviction gradually came over her that he was masquerading, that he was but playing a part to please his subjects. It was not a nice part, but duty demanded it. The tension of her mind relaxed, and she began to make excuses for him. She reassured herself that behind that panoply of religion and state she would find the real man, whose friendship she valued, whose standard of perfection she unconsciously desired to see maintained.

From the Rajah she glanced at the purohits. They were unlike any men she had seen before. Tall, strong, finely developed, in the zenith of their manhood, they belonged to a world of which she knew nothing. Their foreheads, like the Rajah's, were heavily marked with ashes. The two who carried the brass pans containing the fire reminded her of pictures she had seen of Egyptian priests. They held the dishes aloft, waving them gently to fan the embers sufficiently to burn the incense cast into the pans. A pale blue smoke curled upwards, spreading the aromatic scent of benjamin through the hall.

As the procession moved forward, the pujaris chanted muntrums and hymns of adoration in low nasal tones. The peculiar, sustained notes of the chant, suggestive of rudimental gregorians, were supposed to be peculiarly acceptable to the divinity. The words were addressed to the Rajah, representing the deity by virtue of the divine afflatus resting on him.

As he accepted the evidences of his people's loyalty, expressed towards the royalty of his position rather than to his person, so he now received the adoration offered to the divine nature with which he was supposed to be temporarily invested.

Was it impious arrogance to pose as the ark of his god? The question presented itself to his mind but did not disturb him. He remembered that his forefathers had

performed the function before him. To follow their example was not only natural—it was expected of him. Mr. Harlesden himself had said so. No one dreamed of criticizing the action or calling it in question. Why should he not fulfil the expectations of his people? He had a good example in the person of his sovereign Emperor, who never shirked his public duties, tedious and protracted though they might be.

It was possible the thought occurred to him that the English sovereign performed no such ceremonial as this; but, whatever may have been the private opinion of the Rajah, he held it in abeyance, obedient to the oft-repeated injunction to consider the State before all things. In this spirit of obedience he submitted to be bathed, anointed, and marked with sacred ashes by the purohits; to receive their adoration, and to appear in his new and exalted capacity in public. That the pujaris worshipped him personally, was incredible to one who had been brought into contact with western thought. Their worship was directed towards an unknown element, possibly existing only in their imaginations, possibly existing indefinably, but not forming any portion of his own conscious human personality.

Weird music skirled in his ear, and beat of tomtom relieved the tedium of the slow march forward. The brilliantly lighted hall and rich extravagance of colour and glitter were no new sight. He had seen pageants of light and colour in his childhood, and later, in Paris and Vienna. His eye, devoid of expression, passed vaguely over the scene as the curtain was lifted. The dais, with its row of Europeans and nobles, was the horizon of a vista formed by the dense crowd in the body of the hall. The variety of tints gave a uniformity of tone, destroying detail and marking nothing in particular. One spot alone stood out distinctly from the reds and golds and purples.

As he drew near, his eyes, abstracted and expressionless,

were gradually focussed upon the white diaphanous dress of the English girl, with its dewy sparkle of crystal here and there. Complexion, hair and eyes harmonized with the costume and produced an impression of luminosity calculated to draw the eye even of an ascetic from its abstraction.

The sensation of impersonality produced by the ceremonies of the pujaris still enveloped him. He was not conscious of his gaze having any definite direction. As he neared the steps of the dais, the violet eyes, that were fixed with a startled wonder on his, penetrated the armour of impersonality and reached the humanity of the man. An answering light leaped into his own as, in accordance with the order of the ceremony, he stopped at the foot of the steps.

The musicians ceased their barbaric dance and music, and passed to the left, losing themselves in the crowd. The nobles on the dais rose to their feet, the Europeans following their example.

It was the only sign of their homage permitted.

What spirit of mischief was it that tempted Delphine at that critical moment to make a curtsey to the Rajah ?

It was impossible to say. Standing out conspicuous from the rest in her white garments, guiltless as an Indian widow of jewel or ornament, she alone of that multitude, dared to disregard the divine and greet the human with a smile of welcome that illuminated her whole face. Slowly, deliberately, and with inborn grace, she bent low in western homage.

Already the eyes of the assembly were directed towards her by the Rajah's unconscious gaze. Nothing was lost; nothing could be hidden. A wave of consternation, mingled with deep displeasure, passed over the entire crowd, stirring them like an electric shock.

The Rajah saw the action, and, in spite of the momentous

issues, his pulse leaped in response. He understood how the heart of the English girl went out towards the friend of her youth in what she imagined to be the triumph of the hour. He had seen the curtsey made on a former occasion, when another figure was the object of her homage. In England her act would have been fitting, and in accordance with the dignity of the hour. His eyes softened, and, for a brief second, the shadow of a smile hovered round the lips—no longer hidden by a moustache—as if in acknowledgement.

The purohits stood immoveable, the sacred fire still held aloft, their dark eyes glowering in anger at the foreign intruder.

The Rajah was the first to recover his presence of mind. He began to mount the steps towards the throne. The pujaris should have moved with him, step for step; but they remained sullen and motionless, directing gloomy looks towards Delphine, the sacred fire dying down as they ceased waving their dishes. The leader held up a hand, as though to stop the ceremony. Divining what was in his mind, the Dewan advanced quickly, and said something in his ear.

Meanwhile the Rajah, with instinctive imperiousness, ignored the check in the proceedings, and showed himself prepared to take his seat without the assistance of the purohits if they did not choose to fulfil their part. His action, combined with the warning spoken by the Dewan, had the effect of conquering their scruples. They hesitated no longer, but passed quickly to his side before he had time to place himself on the throne.

The face that he turned to the thronged hall was devoid of all expression of human emotion, and the eyes once more wore the lifeless abstraction consonant with his exalted position. With hands clasped in front of him and body motionless as an image on its pedestal, he remained for the

space of fifteen minutes, the pujaris recommencing their chant, which had been broken off at the foot of the steps.

At a given signal, the musicians returned, formed their figure, and resumed their piping and drumming. With the same quaint circlings within a circle they passed slowly down the hall, the Rajah following, supported by the temple men. Again the curtain was lifted by the sowars, and, when it was dropped, the guard formed in front, as though to preserve it from desecration. The wail of the music died away as the Rajah was conducted back to his rooms to complete the rites prescribed by the temple authorities.

On the disappearance of the Rajah and the purohits, a babel of voices arose. Those who had been seated on the dais gathered in groups to discuss the ceremony. Among the Europeans the conversation was general. No one cared to remark on the incident, as it was impossible to blame either of the culprits. The act of homage, though out of order on that particular occasion, was respectful and inoffensive in itself. If any one was to blame, it must be the Rajah, for it was his recognition of it that gave rise to superstitious forebodings in the minds of the natives. His oblivion of the status he held, transient though it was, might provoke the wrath of the deity. A prince is punished through his people. What dire misfortune might he not bring upon his subjects? In the sight of the assembly he had forgotten his godhead, and manifested his humanity—a lapse none of his forebears had ever been guilty of.

Harlesden was silent, and the Dewan's face betokened anxiety. Delphine, a little doubtful as to how her innovation had been received, was excited and sparkling, a marked figure wherever she happened to be. Her eyes frequently sought the curtain at the end of the room. Would the Rajah join them? She dared not hope that he would. He had himself explained that it was impossible. Yet hope rose again and again that the curtain would be drawn

aside; and that the tall commanding figure freed of all trace of heathendom, would reappear with eyes that never failed to seek hers, and a smile of greeting reserved for no one else.

Harlesden, ruffled and distrait, was not too abstracted to note the direction of her glance. A third person was equally perceptive.

As Dr. Constable drove home with his wife, he heard his name uttered in the voice that foreboded much. He replied mildly—

"Well, my dear."

"Delphine must go back to her mother."

They glanced at each other in the dim light of the carriage lamps, and the Doctor coughed.

"H'm!" he said, presently. "That's a thing more easily said than done!"

CHAPTER XIX.

MANY years ago the Residency had been a summer palace for the use of the zenana. Thither came the ladies, dressed very much as the native ladies of the present day, to spend the hot months of April and May; to enjoy more fresh air than the palace garden permitted, and more liberty in the seclusion of the country. The death there of a favourite wife of one of the Rajahs brought the place into disfavour, and another summer retreat was found for the Ranees.

When the State came under British protection, the house was assigned to the use of the Resident. Alterations were made, and the English official had to be content with a dwelling that contained as many passages as rooms, and seemed by its plan as though it were expressly designed for the game of hide-and-seek. The most attractive feature was the garden, with its terraces, artificial pools, its profusion of Persian roses, oleanders, pomegranates and other bushes, forming a shrubbery intersected by a maze of paths. The grounds were surrounded by a high wall, hidden from view by belts of thickly-foliaged trees.

A day or two after the durbar, Harlesden held a semi-official reception, to which the Rajah and a number of the nobles were invited.

Like the rest of the Europeans, the Resident had his major-domo, who governed his establishment of servants, and proved himself efficient when his master desired to entertain.

Tents were pitched upon the grass, and seats grouped on terrace and lawn. A piece of scarlet cloth, many yards in length, was laid down from the portico to the terrace. Carriages were to stop at the edge of the red cloth, and the guests would be received upon the cloth by their host according to their rank. All was in readiness in front of the house an hour before the time fixed for arrival.

Harlesden was in his sitting-room, known to the servants as the office, occupied with official papers. In the back verandah the butler superintended the making of an orange salad. Like Daniel, he was a Hindu by birth, and a Roman Catholic by religion. Seated by his side was one of the peons, Cassim, a Muhammadan. The only active member of the company was Karapan, the second cook, a useful man, who went into camp with his master, and served as table servant as well as cook on emergencies.

Karapan was a heathen, a willing, hardly worked servant, whose great virtue was contentment. At that moment he was busy cleaning a large brass bowl, of beautiful design. It was intended to hold the fruit salad. The old brass shone like gold under his industrious fingers.

Cassim, the peon, wearing the scarlet and gold uniform belonging only to the palace and the Residency, looked on and talked.

"Is it true, oh, most honourable butler of his Excellency! that the ceremonies whereby His Highness, the Rajah, is set upon his father's throne—may the dead prince rest in peace!—are at an end?"

"It is understood to be so; and this party, which we are giving to-day, will be the last—except for the second durbar.

"When there will be no purohits?"

Karapan listened as he polished. He had an insatiable desire for gossip, and was ever ready to acquire or to impart

news. He opened his large mouth to seize an opportunity of putting in a word the moment it occurred.

"It is said——" he began.

He was silenced by a contemptuous motion of the butler's hand.

"The party to-day," said the butler, "will be like a durbar, English fashion; such is the order, and hence this preparation. All is ready, except the orange salad and the making of the tea."

"It is said——" Karapan began again. He spoke in a loud voice, and boldly disregarded the signals for silence on the part of the butler. "It is said that the party is called by the new English missie sahib a pig-a-nig, since they eat their food out of doors. This is not the way with native gentlemen."

The butler turned scornfully upon him.

"A pig-a-nig! It makes laughter in the throat when the frog in the swamp talks of the doings of the eagle upon the mountain! A pig-a-nig is not held with carpet and table-cloths and tents and best china. It is when the sahibs enter the jungle and sit where caterpillars crawl and grasshoppers prance."

Karapan, reproved for his ignorance and disposed of, busied himself with the outer part of the bowl till it shone like the gilded sky at sunset.

"His Highness was not over pleased with all that the Dewan obliged him to do," remarked Cassim. "The long sitting was wearisome and the garments of State heavy. So also was the jewelled turban, once his father's."

"The people say that he was too many years in England, where all is upside down in these days. Our newspapers tell us that the highborn send their sons to a country in the far west, beyond the seas to work like coolies; and those whose fathers were once coolies sit near the Emperor and make laws and taxes. Therefore, say the newspapers, let

no one think that he cannot rule just because he is born poor and of low caste."

"That is all right for a nation that has neither caste nor the religion of the prophet to consider. Here such upside-down ways would only breed pride, and give cause for sound beatings. Are the caste ceremonies ended?"

"All are finished. The rites by which caste is restored are not nice," said the butler, with a wagging of the head. Being a pariah, and a Christian, he was not likely to be required to perform any.

"Humiliation lies in many of the Hindu practices; but, unless His Highness consented to submit, he could never sit upon the throne."

Karapan had finished polishing the bowl outside. He gathered together a particularly nasty mess of grease, the juice of limes, sand, and ashes, and kneaded them into a ball. With this he smeared the interior of the bowl, using his hands to spread and rub it in. The slight pause that followed the peon's remark gave him the opportunity for which he was ever on the watch.

"It is said——"

The butler quickly interposed, and Karapan was talked down.

"The ceremonies appear undesirable in the eyes of the followers of the Prophet; but it is well known that they cannot be dispensed with."

"It is said——" began Karapan again, as he worked away at the bottom of the bowl. It was the peon who over-rode him this time.

"The Dewan was always against the young Rajah being sent to England. He told the old Highness that it was a mistake to try and teach the sacred bull of Shiva to run like an English carriage horse."

"It is said——" Karapan rushed at his opportunity with

loud and rapid speech that could not be overborn. "It is said that the Dewan made it very hard on that account or the young Rajah in all the ceremonies. Many things might have been left out; but the Dewan, following the old custom——"

"Shooh! Silence!" cried the butler. "How the crow caws when he roosts on the palace!"

Karapan, unabashed, applied himself vigorously to his task. Taking up another lump of the repulsive medium, he daubed it recklessly over the inside of the bowl. The butler turned to look at him, and, for the first time, observed his method.

"Wherefore, son of a washerman's donkey! art thou fouling the inside of the bowl that is to hold the sahibs' orange salad? Thou grandson of a buffalo! Is there not soap and water for cleansing interiors?"

He administered a cuff that knocked off the dirty turban covering Karapan's head, and sent it rolling along the verandah. The man picked it up without a word, and proceeded to wind it afresh round his shaven head.

"Most honourable Excellency! lord of his Honour's servants! The sahibs do not ask how their pots are cleaned. They only require them to be clean."

"Would they eat food out of a vessel which had been smeared with that filth, thou lump of mud?"

"It is a mistake to be overwise like the snake, which must live in a hole because he knows the ways of men too well. Besides, the sahibs have no caste."

"Get on with thy work. The sahibs have plenty of caste, but in these days of plenty business it is too much trouble to keep it. Take off all that mess, and rinse out the bowl with soap and water."

When the butler had recovered from this digression, he resumed the discussion with the peon concerning the difficulties of the Rajah.

"His Highness himself ventured to show his dislike to too much ceremony."

"And came to take counsel with our master," added Cassim, eagerly, and not without pride in the fact. "His Honour gave him good advice. I listened outside the door, and heard what passed. Our master said, 'It is necessary, Highness; it is what your father would have wished.'"

"What reply did the Rajah make?"

"He said in an angry voice, 'Am I a fool, that I should submit to this childishness—I, who have had an English education? If it could be done in the privacy of the palace, I should not mind so much; but the Dewan has decreed that the people should look on, together with the Europeans, with my secretary and his sister. It fills me with shame.' That was what he said."

Karapan had scooped the grease and ashes out of the bowl with his finger. He washed the bowl with soap and water, as he had been directed. Instead of going to the kitchen for a cloth to wipe it out, he pulled out the end of his turban and used it as a towel.

"It is said——" he began.

"What did his Honour reply?" asked the butler, to which the peon responded immediately.

"He spoke softly and kindly like a father to His Highness. 'Your education in England was given to make you a good ruler of your people; not to teach you to rebel against custom and overturn the traditions of your faith. It may seem senseless folly to you; it is not to them. Bear with the Dewan and do as he wishes. When the ceremonies are over there will be plenty of time for amusement and tomarsha.' Thus he tried to comfort His Highness."

"Our master was wise. He would have had the last ceremony with the sacred fire performed more privately; but the Dewan would not listen. It has always been the

custom for every resident of importance in the town to be there to see; otherwise bad luck follows."

Cassim looked at the butler with significance.

"It was the presence of the secretary sahib and the missie sahib that put the ball of fire in the breast of His Highness."

Karapan was standing near the bowl, having finished the cleaning to his own satisfaction, though probably to no other person's. He coiled the end of his turban that he had been using as a tea-cloth round his head and tucked in the end behind his ear.

"It is said that the missie sahib looked at His Highness as he walked between the purohits in the durbar hall. Their eyes met and it seemed as though they inwardly laughed at the ceremony with the sacred fire."

He had gained the ears of his superiors at last. They both turned their heads to listen, and the butler deigned to ask—

"Who told that tale, grandson of a parrot?"

Karapan drew himself up as proud as the Dewan Regent himself in the midst of his Council, and, placing a hand on either hip, he replied—

"It is common talk in the bazaars. It is said that the Dewan saw the look that passed between them and guessed what was in their hearts. The pujaris also noted it, and they were very angry. The chief of them raised his hand in his wrath. He would have stopped the ceremonies and put out the sacred fire. The Dewan ruled it otherwise. He whispered something in their ears which compelled them to go forward and proceed."

"What was it? Speak!" commanded the butler.

"That if they did not complete the ceremonies and place the Rajah on the throne, the English would send the throne to England for the white Emperor to sit upon. Thus the State of Shivapore would be made as Bombay or Madras.

There would be no Rajah, no council, and no place for native gentlemen in the Government. This frightened them, and they made haste to finish setting His Highness on the throne of his ancestors."

"Enough, chatterer! Thou art like a monkey in a tamarind tree," said the butler ungratefully, when he had finished.

"The Dewan is a strong man," remarked Cassim. "It needs a very strong man to rule the purohits."

"He governed well in the Rajah's absence," allowed the butler.

"It is said——" began Karapan.

"Dah! get to thy work!" snorted the butler. "Nothing but a mud pellet can silence the cawing of the crow!"

"It is said that the Dewan is full of trouble. He has a daughter whom he desires to see married to the Rajah; but His Highness——"

"Silence! thou son of a buffalo! What dost thou know about the Rajah? The dog in the palace kitchen has more knowledge of the doings of the Rajah than thou! Go, lazy one, and tell the cook to bring the oranges for the orange salad."

Karapan obediently moved away towards the kitchen. The butler drew from the breast-pocket of his coat a large spectacle-case, and took out a pair of old-fashioned horn-rimmed spectacles that he poised on his nose. He unfolded a half-sheet of paper and studied it. Cassim duly impressed looked on, and, appreciating the import of the moment, forebore to make further remark. The cook, a stout man in a red turban, issued from the kitchen, closely followed by Karapan, bearing a basket of oranges, some knives, and a bottle of brandy.

The butler waited till the cook and his assistant had arrived and seated themselves on the floor, where most culinary operations are conducted in India. With many

preparatory glances from paper to cook and from cook to paper he began to read, using his left hand to emphasize each sentence. He addressed himself exclusively to the cook.

"The paper says, Take half the oranges."

"Take half the oranges, thou lump of mud!" said the cook to Karapan, at the same time giving him a push that partook of the nature of a thump, by way of stirring him to activity.

Karapan counted out the fruit into two portions.

"Peel them," continued the butler.

"Peel them," repeated the cook, picking up a knife to help in the operation, and passing another to the butler.

When sufficient were divested of their skins, recourse was had to the paper, and the reading aloud of the recipe was continued.

"Squeeze the juice of the other half of the oranges into a basin."

The cook repeated the directions, and cut the oranges in halves, whilst Karapan squeezed them as though they were sponges into the basin he had so industriously cleaned.

"Slice the peeled oranges into the juice."

The cook sliced, using his left hand to hold the fruit at the imminent risk of cutting his palm. He handed the slices to Karapan, who received them in his fingers and dropped them into the basin, pulling apart those pieces which the knife had failed to sever completely.

"Put in the sugar," directed the butler.

The cook took up the paper packet of crushed sugar and passed it to Karapan.

"Put in the sugar, and be careful, grandson of a bandicoot, that you do not spill any."

The sugar, filtered through the fingers, was sprinkled over the mass in the basin.

"Stir well till the sugar is dissolved," read the butler.

"Stir well till the sugar is dissolved, thou idle dog!" repeated the cook.

Karapan put his hand in the bowl and stirred the contents.

"Add a tumbler of brandy."

The butler laid down the paper and went into the house to fetch a tumbler. Into the glass he poured the brandy. A few drops fell from the bottle as he raised it. Karapan caught the drops dexterously and drank.

"Dah! Offspring of a jackal! What art thou about?" cried the butler as he handed the glass to the cook, who poured a little from the tumbler into the hollow of his palm and swallowed it with relish. The rest he emptied into the basin.

"Stir, thou worthless one," he commanded. "It is a wonder that his Honour keeps such an idle budmash in his household."

Again the hand was inserted, and the decoction stirred in a manner that would not have induced any of the guests, however devoted to fruit salad, to partake of it.

What the eye does not see the mind does not trouble about. The Englishman would die of starvation were he to witness the preparation of his food in an Indian kitchen.

Cassim had looked on with intense interest. As Karapan dried his hands on the end of his turban preparatory to carrying the bowl to the refreshment tent, the peon observed.

"These English sahibs have strange ways. That is not how the followers of the Prophet eat oranges; though, doubtless, the addition of brandy makes the fruit more desirable. We of the faith do not drink brandy."

"Oranges are a cold fruit, and the brandy makes them

sit warm on the heart," commented the cook, as he rose to go back to the kitchen. "Now, thou son of a jungle pig! Carry the bowl to the tent, and return quickly to make the tea. Thou wilt assuredly be beaten if all is not to His Honour's liking."

CHAPTER XX.

HARLESDEN'S eyes were kept resolutely upon the official paper lying before him on the table. He was master of his eyes, but not of his thoughts. The subject under consideration melted away again and again, and in its place appeared the vision in white on the scarlet-covered dais; the deep curtsey, and the look that went with it, a challenge and a greeting in one to Shivapore's Prince. It was calculated to make any man, prince or commoner, lose his head. Did she know what she was doing? Was she aware that she was playing with fire of a dangerous and explosive nature? Could her brother be blind to possibilities involving all kinds of difficulties?

Sometimes Harlesden was tempted to regret that he had been instrumental in procuring the appointment of secretary to the Rajah for Dersingham. Yet he could not but acknowledge to himself that as far as Ted was concerned he had proved an unqualified success.

The sound of a motor-horn startled him. There was yet ten minutes to the time mentioned on the cards of invitation. He went to the portico where the carriages were to draw up, the guests passing to the garden by way of the scarlet cloth instead of entering the house.

One of the palace motors glided swiftly up to him, and Mrs. Constable stepped out, followed by Delphine.

"Go back to the writer sahib's bungalow and wait for him," said Mrs. Constable to the chauffeur. Turning to

Harlesden, she explained. "Ted was sent for all in a hurry to the zenana. He will follow as soon as he is at liberty. We are a little early, I am afraid. I am not accustomed to motor travelling, and allowed more time than was necessary. I don't like rapid travelling," concluded the decided lady.

"Your husband is coming, I hope?"

"He will arrive later."

Harlesden led the way to the place prepared for his guests.

"Come and see if my man has got everything right, Mrs. Constable," said Harlesden, knowing that it would give her pleasure to be asked to look round.

They entered the tent that held the buffet for the tea and coffee. The long table was arranged with a profusion of flowers, with here and there a plate of bread-and-butter or cake. Ten or a dozen servants stood near, clothed in spotless white. They were not all on the regular staff, the butler having supplemented his band of servers from other houses. Among them, very much in the background, was Karapan, in clean clothes and a borrowed turban to replace the dirty rag he had worn an hour ago.

"Your Honour will see that nothing has been forgotten," the butler ventured to say, as he followed his master and the visitors with a trepidation and subservience of manner never exhibited in the back verandah. "With my own hands have I arranged the table and made the orange salad. Nothing has been left to the foolish understrappers of the kitchen, whose laziness exceeds the laziness of the washerman's donkey."

He glanced severely at Karapan who had timidly advanced a step or two that he might not lose the word of approval if it should be uttered by the master. It would be addressed, of course, to the butler; but there was a grain of satisfaction in hearing it spoken.

"It all seems admirable," said Mrs. Constable.

"You are expecting a large number to-day, Mr. Harlesden?" said Delphine, looking at the table.

"Yes; quite a crowd."

"But is this all you are providing? It seems very little—please don't think me critical—not enough for a large gathering, except for that enormous bowl of orange salad."

"Little!" repeated Harlesden, in surprise. "On the contrary, I was inclined to think that the provisions had been overdone. Butler!"

"Sahib!" He pronounced it "Sah!"

"Why have you made such an enormous bowl of orange salad?"

The butler drew himself up, and replied with a strange mixture of pride and respect—

"That, sahib, is for magnificence. The oranges are from the garden; the brandy is cooking brandy. It was necessary that the native gentlemen might see that master could be magnificent!"

"Oh!" replied Harlesden, a little puzzled. "I suppose it is all right." He joined Delphine again and said, "There is plenty for the Europeans. The natives will not eat with us because of their caste."

She looked round at him with the spirit of the inexperienced reformer glistening in her eye.

"Caste, caste, caste! It dominates every one, and has a most disastrous effect. It kills competition and deadens the wholesome discontent that in the West sends a man forward in search of broader fields of action and higher ideals. Instead of fighting against this old-man-of-the-sea sitting on India's shoulders, you encourage him, you nurse him!"

"Caste is such an integral part of the Hindu system that one might as well try to abolish the mortar in a brick building as attempt to eliminate it from Hinduism."

"Which really means that you are afraid of it; and not you alone, but the whole Hindu race is afraid of it. It is the only thing on this earth that the Rajah fears. He has plenty of courage, equal to the courage of the bravest Englishman; but caste conquers him. It is his master. I wish he had some unprejudiced friend to help him to break away from it. Ted can't do it, as he is a paid servant. You might—but you are afraid."

He did not relish the outspoken accusation nor the glance that accompanied it. He replied, a little nettled—

"You are not quite just, Miss Dersingham. I, too, am a paid servant, not of the Rajah, but of the ruling Government, whose decrees have to be obeyed by him and by me without calling them in question. We must be patient, and wait for a desire on the part of the people to break through the trammels so long established. Reform must come from within, not from without. Meanwhile caste preserves order and keeps men in their places."

"The order thus kept might be called oppression by some people. I heard Dr. Constable say the other day that caste would have to go sooner or later if the people are to have representative government."

"You must take what my husband says with a grain of salt, Delphine," interposed Mrs. Constable. "The Doctor has a reason for wishing to overthrow caste. His reason is not political, it is humanitarian. He loses hundreds—yes, I am not exaggerating—literally hundreds of patients through the ignorant practices imposed by caste. It rises up against treatment, against prescriptions, against diet. Often he comes home raging because a strong young man is slipping through his fingers for want of some treatment that caste forbids. As for the women, he not only has caste to fight against, but the purdah custom that interposes a curtain between him and his patient. Added

to this there is an appalling amount of prejudice and ignorant superstition in the zenanas."

"My concern is chiefly for the Rajah," said Delphine, and, bending over a bowl of eucharis lilies, she dismissed the subject by saying, "What lovely flowers! Are they out of your garden?" Suddenly she drew back from the snowy white blossoms nestling among the dark green foliage. "By-the-bye, I hope you are not troubled with a plague of scorpions here."

"I have not found any," Harlesden replied, in some surprise.

"We have had several in the house as well as in the garden."

"I don't understand it," said Mrs. Constable. "In former times we have found an occasional scorpion when pots have been moved or before a thunderstorm. We have never had them in any quantity. There was one in the motor to-day. Fortunately Daniel found it as he was arranging the cushions for us—a huge black creature, most formidable and dangerous. It had tucked itself into a crevice of the padding, just where it might have touched and stung our necks had we leaned back. Your brother must see to the garage where the Rajah's motors are kept," she concluded, turning to Delphine.

The jingle of harness and roll of wheels unsoftened by rubber tyres, diverted Harlesden's attention. They left the tent and caught sight of several carriages approaching. They were driven slowly, the horses curbed in by their cruel bits till the foam from their mouths reddened. Their knees were lifted to their noses in the showy prancing thought necessary to the dignity of the native gentlemen who rode inside the vehicles.

The leading carriage pulled up by the red cloth, and a peon belonging to the Residency hurried to the Political Agent with the name of the guests. Consulting

a paper that lay on a small table close at hand, he said—

"Kangra Rao, his son, son-in-law, and nephew. They must be met twenty paces away. Tell their honours that I await them."

The party slowly descended from the carriage and advanced. When they had reached a certain point, Harlesden walked ceremoniously forward. They greeted him after the fashion of their nation, and then shook hands. He conducted them to the terrace, and they seated themselves in silence. A peon approached with another name. Again he consulted his paper.

"Excuse me, Mrs. Constable," he said. "I must meet each noble at the exact spot due to his rank or I shall give offence. This one has to be greeted halfway."

The arrival of Dr. Constable and the Wythalls relieved the monotony. They stood on no ceremony, but followed closely on the heels of the peon who carried their names. Royama and her father were the next arrivals. Gopaula, ranking after the Dewan, but above Kangra Rao, was met nearer to his carriage. The Dewan, driving in a new motor resplendent in scarlet and gold, had the honour of being received immediately he stepped down. Some of the guests of lesser rank had to walk to the terrace where the chairs were placed. There was neither envy nor discontent, as long as the Resident showed no favour, and was rigidly just in his ceremonial. This was one of the good results of caste. Order, dear to the heart of the busy overworked government servant, was evolved, and with it contentment.

"What a serious business the reception of native gentlemen is!" remarked Mrs. Constable, to whom the function was not new.

"It is most amusing. It makes me laugh to see Mr. Harlesden taking it all so solemnly," said Delphine.

"We mustn't laugh," observed Royama, who was

thoroughly enjoying herself. "It really is of the utmost importance that Mr. Harlesden should be particular, otherwise it would create endless heart-burnings."

"Jealousies?" asked Delphine.

"Not exactly; the feeling would be one of intense disappointment and annoyance if he deprived them of the smallest amount of honour due to their rank."

"I should just shake hands with them all and have done with it."

"That would never do. The King of England might just as well ask any one and every one to dine with him. Even in the shaking of hands there ought to be care. A Viceroy who shakes hands with everybody gives offence to the Rajahs who do not value a favour granted to all castes and classes without discrimination."

"Royama, you're a little imperialist, caste-ridden, like the rest," said Delphine, laughing.

Whilst Harlesden was engaged receiving his guests Ted arrived. He did not wait for the car to reach the portico, but jumped out a little distance away, and made a short cut across the grass to the garden. He was greeted warmly by the group of Europeans.

"Hallo, Dersingham! Had a busy time lately?" asked Wythall.

"Great Scott! Yes. It's all these new improvements we're trying to introduce that creates the trouble. I am beginning to think that Shivapet did very well as we found it; and that the time hasn't come for improvement."

"Been called to the zenana again?" asked Dr. Constable, with a twinkle of the eye in which practical sympathy lurked.

"That's it! In the middle of lunch, too!"

"What was wrong this time?"

"The new water-supply. It has just been laid on in the zenana. The Ranees were so pleased with the taps—

things they had never seen before—that they turned them all on at once, and their rooms were flooded."

"Tiresome creatures! Why didn't they turn them off again?" asked Mrs. Constable.

"No one thought of it."

"Who turned them off, then?" asked Wythall.

"I did," replied Ted, with a note of triumph in his voice.

"You!" exclaimed more than one of the company. "You're not allowed in the zenana!"

"They had to put up with my presence for once in their lives. You should have heard them shriek as I appeared on the scenes, led by that old scarecrow, Amabai, who interprets. The women took cover like a lot of frightened rabbits. There was no help for it, as I explained to the Rajah afterwards. I couldn't stand on ceremony with the palace being flooded in that way. It will cost something to renew the carpets, mats, and rugs that have been spoilt."

"What did His Highness say?" asked Mrs. Constable.

"He laughed as I haven't seen him laugh since we've been in India. After that solemn function he went through the other evening it needed a good laugh to restore the balance; and, by George! this did it! He pictured those women making frantic efforts to hide on my sudden intrusion, and he roared again. As he said, if you only knew how very plain they all were, you would laugh too."

"Poor ladies!" said Royama. "It takes us a long time to learn your English ways; but it takes longer still for you to understand ours."

"Everything eastern is inverted," remarked Mrs. Constable.

"According to your way of looking at it," said Royama. "In our opinion it is the West that is inverted."

"The mistake is in the excess," said Gopaula, who had been listening to Ted's story with as much appreciation as any one present. "We shut our women up too closely;

you err on the other side, and allow too much liberty, if I may be allowed to say so."

"Quite right, Mr. Gopaula," exclaimed Mrs. Constable. "I never had so much liberty when I was young."

She had been long enough in Shivapet to have imbibed something of its conservatism. Unconsciously her eye rested on Delphine as she made the remark.

"Liberty is a fine thing—when you know how to use it," said her husband.

CHAPTER XXI.

Harlesden was engaged in conversation with the Dewan, pressing upon him the necessity of introducing the teaching of athletics and physical culture into the schools of Shivapet. The Dewan saw difficulties in the way, based upon caste. The trials of skill and prowess could not be confined to the separate communities. The competitions would have to be open. Parents of caste boys would object to their sons competing with the sons of pariahs, and the scheme, in the opinion of the Dewan, would not find favour with those the Political Agent most wished to benefit.

The visitors had gathered in groups, and were beginning to thaw from the ceremonialism that had enveloped them on arrival. Gopaula had set them a good example by leaving, at the very beginning, the seat to which his host had politely conducted him, and by joining the English guests where his daughter was taking her share in the conversation.

Two peons hurried up to Harlesden with the information that the Rajah was approaching. The motor in which he travelled had out-distanced his bodyguard. The car had come up noiselessly and unobserved; and it was not until he had stepped down that the peons in waiting realized the personality of the visitor.

Harlesden broke off his conversation with the Dewan, intending to hurry to the portico to receive the Rajah before he left the car; but he had not gone many yards when he was met by his guest.

"I am sorry I was not ready to greet your Highness as you came up," said Harlesden.

"My fault. I ought to have waited; but I'm sick of ceremony, and I didn't see why I should not save your walking all the way up to the house only to return immediately. I have no doubt that you have been backwards and forwards many times doing the honours to your other guests."

He bowed to the Dewan and guests in response to their salutations as an English prince would have acknowledged their courtesy. They gazed at him with expressionless eyes too well-bred to show surprise at his unconstitutional bearing in thus recognizing them. The Dewan permitted himself a slight contraction of the brows scarcely amounting to a frown. He wished it to be understood that the Rajah's conduct was not according to his idea of propriety. Meanwhile the Rajah, after exchanging a few words with the guests here and there and having a chat with the Resident, gradually drew near Delphine.

"How delightful it is to feel that all the State ceremonies are over for the time being," he said, as soon as he could find an opportunity.

"You must indeed be glad," she replied, sympathetically. "That last in the durbar hall was very trying. How you could preserve your solemnity—it was nothing less—I can't think."

"You did your best to upset it," he said in a low voice.

"Did I? I wish I had made you laugh."

"I am glad you didn't. We should have had it all over again another evening if any hitch had occurred." A little sigh escaped him, and he continued. "You don't know how tired I am of it all. It has been going on for several weeks. I am entitled to a little amusement, a little pleasure—am I not?"

"Indeed you are! You have fairly earned a holiday," she answered warmly.

"For this afternoon help me to forget where I am. Let me enjoy one hour of freedom."

"A simple enough request! We will imagine that we are once more back at dear old Dersingham, and that this terrace is the Court terrace. Oh! wasn't that last game of polo a triumph?"

He fell in with her humour readily enough. Ted, approaching at that minute, overheard the last sentence, and added—

"The winning of that game was the kindest thing you ever did for the family."

The Rajah, yielding to a happy memory, slipped the walking-stick he carried through his fingers and swung the head of it against an imaginary ball.

"Wouldn't I like to have it all over again! We shall be able to have some polo before long. The ground is ready, and those sowars you are training have quite a good notion of it. We must get some of those fellows' sons to play." He glanced at the nobles. "It ought to come naturally to them; it's an oriental game."

Again he swung the stick and made an imaginary goal. Ted smiled as he followed the Rajah's eye in the direction of the solemn-looking men familiarly termed "those fellows" by the old Etonian.

"You had better take care, Highness. The Dewan has got his eye upon you. He can't make out what you are doing with that stick. He'll come and tell you presently that your father never behaved in that way."

The Rajah laughed as he answered—

"Oh, bother the Dewan! Troublesome old man! I'm sick of him! Miss Dersingham, did Ted tell you of his latest adventures in the zenana?"

"We heard the tale before you arrived. He has confessed that he has outraged the privacy of your mothers' rooms. Of course, you will order his execution at sunrise to-morrow, with a special purdanasheen stand for the Ranees."

"Nothing less will satisfy their Highnesses, I am afraid; and I am trembling lest they should demand your execution as well," he said, in response to her humour.

Ted, remembering that he had a little matter to settle with the Dewan, went in search of him. He drew him aside, and, with national directness of speech, went straight to his subject.

"Dewan Bahadur, you were kind enough to send me a bundle of rupee notes yesterday representing a large sum. What do you wish done with the money?"

"It was a gift to yourself, sir. I shall be pleased and proud if you will accept it," the Dewan hastened to say, as soon as he had recovered from surprise at the Englishman's abrupt plunge into what might be thought a delicate business.

"Why have you sent it?"

"You are doing much for our Rajah. It is but right that we who are rich and able to give presents should show our gratitude in some way. This is how I show mine."

The words were slightly disconcerting, and not altogether free from offence. Ted recovered himself instantly.

"No such evidence of your gratitude is needed, Dewan Bahadur," he replied, as politely as he could. "I am amply paid for my services by the salary I receive from His Highness. I called at your house this morning to return you the notes, but you could not see me."

"I am sorry. I was busy with my religious offices," replied the Dewan, by way of an apology.

"I brought them with me this afternoon, knowing that

I should meet you. Here they are. I must ask you to take them back."

He produced an envelope addressed to the Dewan, and offered it; but the donor retreated a step or two, protesting his inability to accept the packet.

"Impossible, sir! impossible! It would be unlucky. You must forgive my superstitions. To receive back any gift, however small, when once presented, is considered to be full of bad luck."

"What shall I do with the money? I don't intend to keep it," said Ted, with decision.

"That is for you to determine," replied the other suavely, and showing an inclination to slip away.

"Stay, Dewan Bahadur, and let me have this matter out with you. You want something."

The Dewan smiled broadly not in the least ruffled by the implication lying behind the assertion.

"Does there exist in this world a man who can honestly say that he wants for nothing?"

"Do you wish me to back up your project for the marriage of your daughter to the Rajah?"

"The Rajah having refused to make her his wife, I am opening negotiations elsewhere," the Dewan answered, his dark eyes meeting those of the Englishman steadily, as he made the false statement.

Ted was conscious of a check in the discussion. The Dewan's quiet, deliberate statement that he was seeking a husband for his daughter elsewhere seemed to bring Ted up suddenly against a stone wall. In the silence that ensued, which the Dewan took care not to break immediately, Ted's discomfiture was completed. He began to wonder if he had not been guilty of superfluous ungraciousness. The Dewan divined what was passing in his mind, and said, in still smoother tones—

"You will, in the kindness of your heart, make me

happy, I am sure, by accepting my little gift. If you see fit to spend it for the benefit of others, I shall be pleased."

"I shall give it to the Rajah."

"By all means do so, sir, if it appears to you the best way of disposing of the money."

Something in his tone suggested hidden amusement, and Ted's irritation was increased. With revenues nursed during a minority and doubled by the mineral development of the State, the Rajah was the one person who least required a gift of a thousand rupees. Before the secretary could reply, the Dewan escaped, joining a group of native gentlemen who were strolling past. Ted heard the even, unemotional tones as he took his part in the conversation.

"Oily old beast!" was his inward comment. "He may say what he likes. He intended that money for a bribe, and I shall tell the Rajah so."

The servants were busy handing round the plates of cake and bread-and-butter, and cups of tea. The native guests looked on as the Europeans ate and drank. Mrs. Constable had thought it part of her duty to remain near Delphine; and the Rajah, after talking with them some minutes, moved about among his nobles, speaking to first one and then another with an easy grace learned in England. They could not be otherwise than gratified, yet there lurked at the bottom of their minds a conviction that the Prince was not acting quite in accordance with his dignity. Presently the Rajah found Harlesden at his elbow.

"Did you hear of my success yesterday, Rajah? I shot a tiger some fifteen miles from here. It had been killing cattle belonging to a village. I sat up near a kill, and bagged him that very night."

The Rajah offered his congratulations, and then said—

"We must get up a shikar expedition soon. Mr. Dersingham has never seen one. I want to show him some big-game shooting, and introduce him to a tiger. We might

have Miss Dersingham and Mrs. Constable out as well, if they would come."

"It can be managed the week after next. A holiday will do us all good," replied Harlesden, genially. "The tiger's skin was brought in to-day. It is in my verandah."

He went across the terrace to where Mrs. Constable was sitting with Delphine, and invited them both to come and see it. He also asked the Dewan and some of the other guests.

"Come, Delphine," said Mrs. Constable, rising. "Let's go and look at it."

"I'll follow you as soon as I have had my second cup of coffee. The butler has gone to fetch it."

The Rajah, seeing that she lingered, stayed behind also. Tigers' skins had no fascination for him. Harlesden, launching forth into a description of how he shot the animal, led Mrs. Constable away. More than half the company followed, and Delphine, for the first time, found herself alone with the Rajah, although there still remained two or three groups of people on the terrace. They were too far off to be able to join in the conversation or to overhear it unless they turned a very sharp ear in that direction. The butler was not long in procuring the coffee asked for by Delphine. He brought a tray with two or three cups, and set it down at Delphine's bidding upon a small table near.

Suddenly she remembered her confident assurance to Harlesden that she would make the Rajah take a cup of coffee from her. She lifted the milk jug, and, turning to him, said—

"Rajah, you will have a cup with me."

He started, glancing at her in surprise.

"Sorry, Miss Dersingham; I'm afraid I mustn't."

"Oh, nonsense! We agreed that we were back at Dersingham again. Of course, you must have a cup."

"I really cannot, must not."

"Why? I don't see why you shouldn't. You took Royama's sweets the other day at the bungalow."

"It's all this troublesome caste business. Miss Gopaula is of my caste," he replied, with reluctance, his wistful eyes showing the regret that he felt at having to refuse.

"To-day I am also of your caste, Rajah. I will not be kept outside. By reason of our long-established friendship I demand admittance."

As she pleaded, she poured in the milk, as she had often done before, and put in the sugar to his taste.

"This is how you like it. I am not going to take a refusal. If you won't have any I must give up mine—and I am just longing for a cup."

"I can't."

There was real distress in his voice, as he said it. The servants retired to the tent where the bowl of orange salad, untouched, remained in the centre of the flower-adorned buffet. To the crowd of curious native gentlemen who had passed through, it had proclaimed the "magnificence" of the Political Agent; and so, perhaps, though unknown to Harlesden, had served a purpose. The greater part of the company had drifted towards the verandah. Royama had not followed. She had stayed by her father's side as he discussed municipal reform with Kangra Rao. They were a little distance away, the men being too much absorbed in their subject to have ears or eyes for what might be happening elsewhere. Royama herself was not interested in the cleansing of the town and the purity of its water supply. From beneath the silk cloth that covered her beautiful hair, her eyes went frequently to Delphine and her companion. She could not catch quite all that was passing between them; but the few words that reached her ears added to what her eyes

told her, left little doubt in her mind that mischief was brewing.

"Do, Rajah! do take it!" pleaded Delphine, her eyes lifted to his, the cup that she had prepared in her hand. "You are not going to refuse *me!*" The accent on the personal pronoun stirred him deeply. "It would be most unkind!"

He did not reply; he was fast losing control of himself. She, on her part, had no notion of the depths she was stirring.

"Rajah!"

The soft appeal barely reached the ear of the listening Royama. She slipped a foot or two away from her father in the direction of the two. Again Delphine spoke.

"Do take it! We are at Dersingham again, Narayan; and I am of your caste to-day."

The magic spell was not in the words so much as in the tone, low, soft and pleading. Both he and she forgot the presence of the guests, forgot where they were. He could think only of the woman for whom at that moment he was ready to sacrifice everything, even his position, his State, his life. His resistance melted under her gaze. He came of a long line of eastern princes, who denied themselves nothing, who never stayed to count the cost when once passion was roused, who rested not till desire was fulfilled. With a reckless disregard of consequences, he yielded on a sudden impulse, and took the cup from her hand.

"Why should I not please the one woman in the world I most wish to please?" he said, with self abandonment.

"Why not, indeed!" was the warm response.

He looked at her and demanded in a low, uneven voice—

"Do you know how much you are asking of me?"

"No, Rajah; it may be against your prejudices, but it is for my sake—to please me."

"Do you understand how great is the sacrifice? In

drinking this coffee, given me by your dear hands, I defile myself in the eyes of my people."

She heard him incredulously.

"I render all those hideous ceremonies that I have gone through of no account. I place myself under the necessity of performing them all again, repugnant as they are." He paused; then bursting suddenly into hot speech he continued, whilst she listened with charmed ears. "Light of my soul! For your sake, my queen! Pearl of my life! For your sake"—he bent towards her, his eyes alight with passion, looking into hers, and lifted the cup. "I do as you ask! At your bidding, my Ranee! I break my caste a thousand times——"

They were both transported into a rosy world, where consequences were not remembered, where heart beats were not counted. He loved her with a glorious passionate love worthy of an eastern prince. She was conscious of a strange sense of triumph in having persuaded him to break away from the ancient fetters of caste that she deemed unworthy of him. The eyes that met his were intoxicating. Prudence and reason were scattered to the winds. Under the hypnotic influence of her gaze he was ready to fulfil her slightest wish, however unreasonable, however costly it might be.

In another moment the deed would have been done that would thrust him again outside the pale; but before the cup could reach his lips a hand dashed it to the ground. Royama hurled herself in between them with a sharp cry.

"A scorpion! A scorpion! See upon your dress Delphine!"

With a fold of her saree she seized a small brown object clinging to the white drapery of the skirt and hurried to the grass where she threw it down. She returned to make a further search on Delphine's dress.

"Pardon, Highness! pardon!" she said in her own tongue. "Forgive your unworthy slave!"

He glanced at her, the fire of madness dying out of his eyes. He comprehended what she had done, but gave no sign that he recognized the service rendered.

Gopaula, startled by his daughter's cry, hurried forward. Others drawn by the same signal of alarm came to see what had happened. The broken cup lay at the feet of the Rajah. The saucer was still in his hand, evidence of the contemplated lapse. With swift perception Gopaula divined something of the truth. He took the tell-tale china from the Rajah and put it quietly on the table. On inquiry from the guests who had not seen the incident, he explained that Miss Dersingham had been frightened by the sight of a scorpion on her dress and had dropped her cup in her alarm.

Meanwhile the butler issued from the tent at the sound of the voices, and Gopaula turned upon him at once.

"The missie sahib has been alarmed by a scorpion on her dress. How came the poisonous insect here?" he asked with a show of anger and in his own language. "This is not the place where they hide. It has been brought here for a purpose."

Did the noble really believe that his daughter could carry away a scorpion and dispose of it so easily? He had sufficient confidence in her to support her story, and with that intention he threatened to denounce the butler to his master.

"I know nothing about it, Excellency," protested the scared servant.

"There is a worker of mischief among his honour's servants. Find the man and punish him," said Gopaula.

The butler returned to the group of attendants who had been assisting with the refreshments. They did not all belong to the Residency household. Five or six had been supplied from Shivapet for the occasion. As far as he

knew they were trustworthy and not likely to be guilty of any evil tricks. However, some one must be found to bear the blame lest he himself should be suspected. He ran his eye over the silent watchful band; their countenances betrayed nothing. The only person whose manner indicated uneasiness was Karapan whose duty it had been to fetch and carry between the house and the tent as fresh hot water was required. From past experience Karapan knew that it was his fate to fill the office of scapegoat in the kitchen when things went wrong. His dread lest his fate should overtake him now was misread by all present.

"There's the man," whispered one or two of the servants, pointing to the trembling Karapan.

The butler with what he considered a suitable display of anger, seized him by the arm and dragged him forward. In broken words, that he could scarcely utter in his abject fear, Karapan assured them that he was innocent. His appearance served as a diversion and drew attention from the Rajah standing moodily aloof.

"This evil son of a pig dropped the poisonous insect on the missie sahib's dress," announced the butler. "He shall be taken to the stables and the syces ordered to beat him well."

Karapan fell upon his face at Delphine's feet, laying the hands, roughened by constant labour, over her instep.

"Missie sahib!" he cried. "I never doing that beastly thing! It is a lie word!"

His English was limited.

"Get up thou worm! Thy cries will only increase thy beating," said the butler.

"Missie sahib! missie sahib!" murmured the poor victim at her feet in pathetic appeal.

"What are you doing, butler?" demanded Delphine, her sense of justice roused. "Did you see him drop the scorpion on my dress?"

"He is too cunning to let any one see his tricks. He is the only one here who would be likely to do such an evil thing."

Delphine looked down at the accused and then at the butler.

"I don't believe it. When could he have done it?"

"When the missie sahib leaned over the flowers upon the table."

"Absurd! ridiculous!" cried Delphine, imperiously. "You want to blame some one so you pick out this poor man. He has not been near me once this afternoon. Mr. Gopaula, please tell him in his own language, which I can't speak," she said as she stooped and laid her hand on the trembling shoulders, "that I know he did not put it there."

He did as she asked; and she added, "If he will come to the palace bungalow to-morrow, I will give him a present."

Delphine's attitude altered the complexion of affairs, and Karapan departed with restored happiness. The butler finding that everybody was satisfied, dropped his severe tone and retired to the tent. Delphine expressed her gratitude to Royama for having removed the scorpion so promptly.

"That is the second to-day. There was one in the motor which was fortunately discovered before we started," she said.

Turning away she found herself face to face with the Rajah.

"Did I hear you say that there was a scorpion in the motor car, Miss Dersingham?" he asked.

It was a relief to her to hear him speak in his usual voice.

"A large black one was discovered by Daniel among the cushions. Ted must have the garage turned out."

His eyes dwelt upon her in silence. She fancied that he feared offence had been given by his impulsive words. She smiled at him as though to reassure him ; but the trouble did not lie there.

" This second scorpion must have been in the car and have crawled on to my dress as we drove here. It is lucky indeed that I have not been stung."

" The gods preserve you, light of my eyes, your God and mine," he said in a low voice. " I may see you to-morrow ? "

" Yes ; to-morrow," she answered.

Harlesden returning from the house with the party that had been to look at the tiger met him, and there was a ceremonious leave-taking. Five minutes later the Rajah was speeding back to the palace a prey to love and fear and anger. It meant a storm. Where would it break ?

CHAPTER XXII.

The storm broke in the zenana the next morning. It began with the Ranees themselves. Through their agents —one of whom was a helper in the refreshment tent, another a temporary gardener at the Residency, a third an acting syce with a guest's carriage—they learned a few facts, and many items of spurious news manufactured by their spies in their zealous desire to please their employers. It was reported that at the garden party the Rajah had appeared without his body-guard; and the Political Agent had not shown him the honour due to his rank; that the Rajah had spoken to no one but the writing-sahib's sister; and she had forced him to drink a cup of coffee and thus to break his caste; that the British Government—in other words the Political Agent—was so angry at the lapse on the part of the Presence that he had ordered him to return at once to England; that the missie sahib was going with him, and they were to be married as soon as the Rajah had changed his religion; that the Shivapore State would be incorporated with British territory; and the Ranees themselves were to be sent to Bombay so that the palace might be made into public offices.

The appearance of the Rajah in the zenana was the signal for an outburst. Sitrama began the wail with a string of accusations mingled with lamentations. When speech failed her for want of breath, one of the others took up the tale. Whilst one spoke the rest wept aloud. It

required a shrill tongue like Sitrama's to dominate the chorus of grief, led by the Ranees and echoed by sympathetic attendants.

The sound awoke memories of his boyhood. Forgotten scenes surged back with a curious vividness. He had often seen his father bearing the brunt of similar domestic storms. He recalled his sire's attitude; how he listened impassively with apparent indifference until the outpouring ceased from the simple effect of exhaustion. Then he took his part in the cyclone, and if the women shrieked like the wind, he roared like the thunder, dominating every voice till the whole multitude trembled before him. He remembered how he himself stood by his father and heard it with indifference as a child; how he looked with scorn and contempt at the tears that were noisily shed, at the rending of clothes and tearing of hair. He idly wondered why his father did not cut off a few heads and order beatings all round for the disturbers of his peace. And here it was, being enacted all over again! Was his English experience of self-controlled men and women a dream, and was this the reality of life?

Standing in the centre of the senior Ranee's sitting-room, a strange mixture of the eastern prince and the modern young Englishman, his hands plunged in the pockets of his faultlessly fitting coat, his Bond Street boots planted apart, he allowed them to finish their outrageous charges, their unjust reproaches and inconsequent complaints.

Had he possessed the phlegmatic temperament of the Island-born Britisher, he must surely have either laughed or been inexpressibly bored and disgusted at their unseemly abandonment to hysterical temper. When they had expended their wrath he would have shown his contempt by turning on his heel in dignified silence and departing; but underneath the English coat smouldered the fiery nature of the oriental assisted by the memory of custom and

tradition. When the second Ranee ventured to launch a torrent of abuse at the sister of his secretary, his anger caught fire and burned fiercely.

In a voice that none of his English chums would have recognized he silenced the crowd of whimpering women with a command that the name of the English lady should not be mentioned in his hearing. She was not to be made the subject of zenana gossip. He would not permit it. If his commands were not obeyed, they might be sure that they would all be speedily removed to Bombay, not by the order of the British Government, but by his order. He would clear the palace, if there was further trouble, of women and scorpions.

At the word scorpions he ceased, and silence ensued, during which every woman present held her breath. So complete was it that a dry crackling sound proceeding from a closed basket in a corner of the room became audible, as of some large insect seeking escape. He heard it and looked at Sitrama, who stood up facing him, never budging an inch, her keen old countenance with its firmly closed lips and shining black eyes lifted to his defiantly. He began again working himself into a veritable rage as his father had done before him.

His caste was unbroken. Some one had lied to them; they had better see to it and make choice of more reliable spies. He was the Maharajah of Shivapore firmly established on his throne, master of his State, master of his palace and of his father's zenana. As for marriage, he would marry—he paused as he met Sitrama's eye steadily—whom he chose.

"It shall be the daughter of the Dewan," said the senior Ranee confidently, her words echoing to the furthest corner and reaching every ear in the room.

"Aiyoh! Let it be the Dewan's daughter! She is the only one who is worthy of our beloved son!" chorused

the other Ranees in a torrent of repetition. They were supported in their clamour by their respective women who were only doing their duty to their royal mistresses in thus showing their sympathy.

The Rajah advanced a step nearer, the tread of his feet sounding heavily on the matted floor. Again he raised his voice to command a hearing and obtained it. Recalling his father's methods he adopted them now and thundered abuse and anathema on them collectively and individually until he had exhausted his vocabulary. It would have jarred horribly on the ears of an Englishman; but oddly enough it was music in the ears of the Ranees. Sitrama received the castigation with a grim twist of the lips as she stood upright and unmoved only a foot or two away from him.

"If another scorpion is found in the bungalow or in any of the carriages, every one of you will be sent to Bombay to await my pleasure. I say it, and my word is stronger than ever was the word of my father."

The Ranees, all except Sitrama, moaned as this terrible pronouncement fell on their ears. He meant what he said. There was no doubt in their minds that they would all be deported if they gave more trouble of the kind they had already originated.

"There will be no more scorpions, my son," said Sitrama, reassuringly. "It was the presence of the foreigners, the Feringhis, that tempted them from their holes."

"And there are to be no snakes, no cholera, no dysentery among my guests," he said with a meaning that she fully comprehended.

"Perhaps the snakes may be guarded against; but sickness is the act of the gods, and who may control them? not even the English doctor with his little silver devil, shut up in a glass tube, that speaks to him after the tube

has been held under the arm. You have behaved like your noble father in this matter and have used the very words he would have used; thus showing yourself to be his true and equally noble son. Your wishes shall be respected. The plague of scorpions shall cease; there shall be no cobras; and, if the gods will, neither shall there be any bad sickness."

His eyes dwelt upon her uneasily. He had spoken out with brutal plainness under which lay a veiled accusation, and she had given him a kind of promise, by no means reassuring, that his wishes should be respected; but it did not necessarily imply submission to his will. The determined strong-willed woman who faced him undaunted and unashamed at his insinuations, was capable of much in the pursuit and accomplishment of her purpose. What new development would she devise whereby the way might be cleared? Powerful as he knew himself to be with a latent inclination to despotism, a shadow of fear crept into his mind, not on his own account but for another. Guard her as he would, he could not be sure of her safety. Delphine's servants were to be trusted; he had made certain of that fact; but there were other ways——. It would be better—safer if she left Shivapet for a while.

"The foreigners who are my guests must run no risks of accident or illness. If anything happens"—he paused as he and Sitrama measured their strength mentally against each other—"there will be punishment, heavy, lasting punishment, that shall blight the lives of those upon whose heads it shall fall."

The Ranees shuddered; but the only effect of the threat upon Sitrama was to cause the eyelids to flicker, as though a flash of lightning had burst suddenly upon her sight.

"Happiness and safety may be the lot of all if the Presence will only marry," she said slowly.

"I have refused the Dewan finally. I will not marry his daughter."

At this the Ranees began their wailing again, but Sitrama silenced them with a wave of the hand. A slow smile relaxed her stern mouth as she replied.

"My son; it is the will of the gods that a man shall be born, shall marry, raise a son and die when his life is spent. Against this there is no way of escape; and it is useless to fight against fate."

"I have not refused to marry."

"That is well, my son."

"But the choice lies with me."

"That also may be well—if she be of our caste and our faith."

His eyes fell at last before her penetrating gaze. He turned on his heel without another word and left the room.

His departure was the signal for the loosening of the tension and for a fresh flow of speech. The Ranees gathered closely round Sitrama who signed to them to be seated. The third Ranee produced the baby doll that Royama had given her and Dr. Constable had prescribed for with such unexpected results. The fourth Ranee fingered a small mechanical toy; and the second passed a string of beads, taken from the neck of one of her servants, through her fingers as a European woman might finger the gold chain that she wore. Thus they prepared to listen to what the senior Ranee had to say.

"The Presence was noble and great in his wrath," remarked the second Ranee.

"The fire of his dead father sleeps in him. I feared lest his long absence had killed it," said Sitrama.

"Can it be that she has complained that the scorpions are too many?" asked the fourth.

"It matters not. They must cease and if needs be

other means must be found of creating a desire in her heart to return to her own people," said Sitrama.

"Nothing will be necessary if our son marries where he ought," remarked the third glancing up from her baby.

"It only requires time. We have but to persevere. He will get tired before long and let us have our way. These men! I know them so well. It was just like that with his father. The thunder comes, the lightning flashes; one stays quietly under shelter and then the sun shines and all is as we would have it."

Sitrama smiled confidently as she thus mapped out the programme.

"What if he marry the English missie?" asked the third Ranee.

"Pah! it would be no marriage."

"Her children would be beautiful. They would be fair of skin and have fair hair like my baby here," said the third Ranee, dreamily. "We should be permitted to keep them in the zenana of course. I should not want this in that case. Poor baby! you would die, darling; and Royama and I would burn you with all the honours due to a king's daughter!"

"Shuh!" exclaimed the senior Ranee, contemptuously; the picture drawn by the third Ranee did not please her. "It is the Dewan's daughter who shall fill our arms with sons and daughters and no one else. I have said it and I know," she concluded with a finality indicating that the struggle over the vexed question was by no means at an end.

Meanwhile the Rajah returned to his own rooms with the intention of awaiting the coming of his secretary. A palace attendant met him with the information that the Dewan had arrived and craved an interview. A message was sent that he might present himself at the audience chamber. The Rajah's blood was stirred with his recent

encounter. If the Dewan intended to renew his proposals, he was ready to crush the last vestige of hope in that direction and let him see that his Prince possessed a will of his own. In this frame of mind he presently went to the council chamber, off which was a smaller room where he was accustomed to give private audiences to those who desired them.

Chakravarti entered suave and conciliatory, the fine aristocratic old face lighting up with an ingratiating smile as he made the customary salaam. The signs seemed unmistakeable; they meant a request.

After the ceremonious greeting the Dewan in accordance with etiquette waited for his Liege to speak. The Rajah made a remark about the necessity of buying a fresh supply of horses for his body-guard. The English secretary would probably be going to Calcutta before long. He might be commissioned to purchase them. He had an exceptional knowledge of horse-flesh; and his honesty, as the Dewan probably had discovered, was beyond doubt. For a second Chakravarti's face fell. He understood the allusion. The Englishman had lost no time in putting his threat into execution. One or two other subjects were touched upon, and the conversation came to an end, the Rajah being resolute in not giving him an opening for a renewal of the marriage question.

"That being all I have to speak about this morning, do not let me detain you, Dewan Bahadur," said the Rajah; his father, innocent of western culture, would have repeated the words, "You have leave to go."

"Highness, pardon! One word more."

"What is it? speak!" said the Rajah abruptly and without encouragement.

"I am the messenger of your humble subjects, the beggars, servants, and lower orders of the city. I have a request to make in their name."

The Rajah turned to the speaker with relief. He had anticipated something very different, and it was with unwonted geniality that he asked.

"What is their cry? Employment?"

"No, Highness; they are all employed in following the occupations of their forefathers, each man according to his caste."

"What do they ask?"

"Once every two years the late Rajah, your excellent father, honoured the people with his presence at a sacrifice at the temple just outside the palace gate. They pray your highness to be present at the next."

"When does it take place?"

"It should be held to-morrow night at eight o'clock."

There was a pause. In his relief at finding that his visitor was not reviving an unpleasant subject, the Rajah had been prepared to be gracious and grant whatever request was made. When he learned what it was, his inclination to accede vanished completely.

"I am not a devil worshipper; nor was my father. It is time the custom was abolished. Let the people have what pujah they desire. Go yourself, if you like, and represent me; but do not reckon on my presence."

A shadow of anxiety crossed the face of the Dewan.

"Perhaps your Highness is not aware that this is a very old custom, and one that cannot lightly be put aside. Years ago before the State came under foreign protection one of your ancestors was miraculously preserved from death by the intervention of the goddess, Karlimaya. An elephant that went suddenly mad pursued the Rajah out in camp. As it lifted its foot to crush him the beast stumbled and fell; and the Rajah had time to escape. When the ground was examined it was found that a stone image had caused the fall. It was the image of Karlimaya. The Rajah in his gratitude brought the idol home and set it up at the

gate of his palace. He ordered pujah to be done once a year at least by all castes, not excluding even the outcastes and foreigners, who might be living in the town. He promised further to be present himself at the pujah; and when he was dying he requested his son and his grandson to keep up the custom, promising that Shivapet should flourish as long as the Maharajah of Shivapore should countenance the worship with his presence. In your father's time it satisfied the people if he attended the pujah once in two years. It will be the same with your Highness. There is not much to do. An offering has to be made and a wreath of oleander blossom placed upon the neck of the image that saved the life of your ancestor."

The even tones for all their smoothness bored like a gimlet into his brain. The Dewan spoke with the certainty of success.

"I am sorry; I cannot grant the request."

"There need be no difficulty, Highness. For just one hour you give yourself to the people, becoming like one of the pujaris themselves, an act for which all men will honour you."

The temper already tried by what had occurred in the zenana rose, and he replied shortly—

"I have already done much for the people. I will do no more."

"Maharaj! hear your humble servant! I know the people, having lived among them all my life. They will be miserable, a prey to superstitious fear if you refuse to comply. Their heart is set upon it."

"That may be. I have done enough as I have already said. It is surely time that I pleased myself."

He spoke haughtily, and the Dewan glanced at him with admiration. He was carrying himself now in autocratic princely fashion. A befitting display of pride should go before the granting of an important concession. He was encouraged to persevere.

"There are many things to which your Highness has submitted lately that have been distasteful. I pray you submit to one more ceremony."

"Why should I?"

"Those born to rank are born to ceremony."

"I will not."

"Maharaj! swami! in the name of your dead father grant your people's prayer!"

The Dewan knelt and stooping low touched the prince's instep with his forehead. The Rajah stood firm and unmoved. He glanced down at the bent figure of the courtly dignified old man who thus pleaded in the name of his subjects.

"Go! I have heard your request."

"What answer may I carry to your subjects, Highness?"

"That I will consider their request."

As the Dewan retired the Rajah sighed. With the conclusion of the religious durbar ceremony he believed that the tedious functions of State and religion were over. This last was sprung upon him and he was in no humour to accede to it. It might be a small matter, but it was none the less irksome and repugnant for that.

He entered the secretary's room and Ted rose with the usual greeting.

"I had your letter last night about the Dewan's little offering. I suggest that you place it to the account of the new hospital that is to be built for the town."

"A happy thought! the very thing! My conscience will be relieved," replied Ted, cheerfully. The Rajah often envied him his good spirits and even temper.

"Any very urgent business this morning?"

"The council meets at twelve as your Highness knows. Mr. Harlesden would like to see you for a few minutes before the sitting begins. With regard to the tank we

went to see, I have placed the facts in Wythall's hands; and I hope the water thief will get his desserts."

The Rajah listened, but Ted could see that he was not giving him his undivided attention.

"By-the-bye, Dersingham, I want you to run up to Calcutta for me. I ought to go myself, but I can't leave just yet. There are several things still to be bought for the palace; a billiard-table and fittings for the billiard-room with proper shades for the lights. They may remove the one we have now. I don't like it. I must have a table with up-to-date improvements. I should like you to see some horses I think of buying for the body-guard. The men will look ever so much better on Walers."

"All right, I'll go if your Highness wishes it. I might choose the stuff for the curtains of the billiard-room and for the seats at the same time."

"Then there's the harness. We must have some fresh harness. That rotten old stuff that my father used isn't safe. I believe it is tied up with string in places, and I'm ashamed of it."

"You don't often use the palace carriages now you have the car; all the same there ought to be decent harness sufficient for all requirements if the car broke down."

"Could you get away to-morrow?"

"If you like; it rests entirely with your Highness."

"And, Dersingham, don't you think it would be a pleasant change if you took Miss Dersingham with you?"

Ted glanced up surprised. In thinking of his journey he had forgotten his sister. It was just like the Rajah to remember that she would be alone in the bungalow if he went away. There was no mother to stay with her now, a fact that he had overlooked.

"A good suggestion. I must wire for rooms at one of the hotels."

"No need to do that. You can make use of the suite

of rooms in my house at Calcutta. The rooms are intended for European guests. Take your two servants and they will see to your personal comfort. The head man in charge of the house will provide what you require."

He spoke eagerly and Ted had nothing to urge in opposition. The thought of being once more in touch with men like himself was by no means distasteful. His only compunction was in leaving the Rajah.

"Can you really spare me?" he asked in doubt.

"For a few days. Don't hesitate on my account. I shall be glad for you to have a change."

Ted was puzzled and not satisfied. He began to wonder what motive underlay the proposal, and immediately felt the hot blood rush to his brow at the consciousness of his suspicion. What was happening to him that he should grow distrustful of avowed motives, and look for a hidden meaning in a straightforward suggestion made for his own benefit by his generous employer? It was unlike himself and unworthy of his open nature.

"Is there any other reason, Highness, for sending me off like this?" he asked bluntly.

"No, Dersingham; no good reason," the Rajah replied at once. "You would laugh at me if I admitted that it was nothing but a presentiment, a vague feeling that some danger threatens. What a superstitious ass I am becoming!" he cried with a sudden change of mood. "Stay if you like. No! go to Calcutta for a few days and take your sister with you. By the time you are back I shall be feeling better."

Ted's face cleared. He thought he understood. The Rajah was prescribing for him the very medicine he most wanted himself.

"Why shouldn't you come with us. It will do you more good even than it will do us."

The invitation rang with heartiness and the eyes of the

listener shone suddenly with the light of pleasure. It faded as quickly as he shook his head.

"Impossible; I have an engagement with the Dewan to-morrow."

"Come the next day. We shan't run away. You'll find us there all right."

"It would be rather nice," he replied with strange reluctance. "We will leave it open and I'll wire to you at Calcutta."

Ted took up a bundle of papers preparatory to receiving instructions for the Rajah's correspondence; but laid them down again as the latter lifted a deprecatory hand.

"I can't. I'm not in a humour for business this morning. Settle all you can without me, and let the rest wait till to-morrow morning. I take it you will start by the night mail."

"If it suits Delphine. I must ask her, of course. I wish you were coming, Rajah," added Ted, in something of his old manner that went straight to the heart of the other man.

"So do I; but I shall be wiser to remain here for many reasons that I don't care to explain," replied the Rajah as he left the room.

Did Ted Dersingham understand? Or was he deaf and blind? Long as the Rajah had lived in England he had not yet gauged the confidence that Englishmen repose in the women of their families; nor did he understand that brothers rarely interfere in their sisters' affairs, so fully do they trust them not to overstep the bounds of prudence. Until Delphine asked for advice and assistance it was not likely that Ted would offer either.

CHAPTER XXIII.

It was with a quickened pulse that Delphine heard a familiar step on the verandah. No call to a servant was necessary to announce the visitor. He had dropped into the way of walking in unheralded except by the swish of the electric brougham as it drew up under the portico. Whether Ted was aware of every visit paid by the Rajah was unknown even to Delphine herself. She made no attempt to keep him informed. On the other hand she did not try to hide the facts. Undoubtedly Mrs. Constable did not hear of half his calls. The purdanasheen women of the palace were not so ignorant. Not only was the coming and going of the Rajah marked and reported with the time of arrival and departure, but the spy took upon him or herself as the case might be to give certain details as to the place where they sat and the bearing of the Rajah as he talked. When they chose the verandah for their chat, fragments of the conversation were sometimes caught. At first Peter had been a difficulty, but his weakness had been discovered; and the little dog was silenced by a dole of sugar that deflected him from the path of duty as a watch-dog.

Delphine was not in the verandah, her usual haunt between breakfast and lunch. The Rajah glanced round, and then walked straight on into the drawing-room without hesitation, as a man sure of his welcome. He had not met her since the little episode in the Residency garden. She

rose and held out her hand in cordial greeting, showing no sign of embarrassment.

"Good morning, Rajah. I was hoping that I should see you some time to-day. I want to tell you how sorry I am that I tried to make you break your caste yesterday. I know it was wrong. Ted explained to me last evening how impossible it was for you to do as I wished and join us in any eating and drinking."

"Did you tell your brother all that passed?" he asked, gazing with keen inquiry into her eyes.

"We talked of the matter generally. I did not think it necessary to confess that I had tempted you; especially as he asked no questions."

He wondered how much of his unpremeditated outburst remained in her memory. Not a word had she forgotten; but this she was careful to keep from him. Whatever a woman intends to do eventually with a man who declares his love, she has no intention of forgetting it. She hugs the memory of it as a tribute to her charms with a strange mixture of triumph and soft regret. The scalp is taken with tender pity and worn secretly with cruel pride. She sees no harm in the mere fact of being loved whether the lover be prince or pauper. It is only after the deed is done that she sits down to consider in cold blood the consequences of her victory.

Delphine's words were indicative of regret that she had placed him in a difficult position. They served to hide the glow that she still felt. Her eyes were soft and bright and her cheek slightly flushed, by which signals he might have read the answer to his thoughts. She had not yet begun to think what she would do with her strange conquest. An unconscious instinct prompted caution; for this reason the hand that was extended and clasped by both of his, held him at arm's length—for the present.

An Englishman would have understood that the way was

still slippery, and that rocks loomed ahead. The Rajah was not an Englishman, and this fact she had yet to realize. Instead of responding in the same mood—renewed friendliness with a memory behind it—he received her apology in silence. She continued talking, thinking it would give him time to recover the balance he had obviously lost the day before.

"Sit down, Rajah. Here is your own chair which I like to see you in. Isn't the room exactly like the Court? I often fancy I am back again, and that poor old Carter, the butler will come in with some message to say lunch is ready or the horses are saddled. Yes; Ted explained that you would have simply a beastly time again with that old Dewan and the pujaris at your elbow if you took a cup of tea or coffee with us. I will never ask you again or tease you. I didn't know! I didn't know! But Royama understood. It was she who saved you. I am sure she stumbled against you on purpose to make you drop the cup."

"Royama! Yes;" replied the Rajah, slowly. "She realised all that it meant."

"Of course!" said Delphine, with a shadow of impatience. "She keeps her caste rules as strictly as you."

His voice was a little unsteady at first, but it became firmer as he continued.

"She interrupted just in time, with a courage that was truly magnificent."

"Did it require much courage to seize the scorpion on my skirt and throw it to a safe distance?" asked Delphine, wilfully misunderstanding what he implied.

"That too was no light task—if it were a real scorpion."

"Real? Was it not real?"

"She might have mistaken a harmless moth or grasshopper for a scorpion in her agitation; but real or not real, she accomplished her object. To dash a cup from the hand

of her Prince that his caste might be preserved was a brave deed. I am grateful now though I was angry at the time."

He spoke dejectedly, but his appreciation of Royama's act was sincere. In some vague way Delphine was slightly irritated at his praise. She was annoyed, whether with him or with Royama or with herself she did not stop to think. She had intended with the best motive in the world from her point of view to make him break his caste. She was under the impression that it would be good for him as well as for others to see some one with sufficient courage to set the bugbear at defiance. After a general explanation of the subject from Ted, who had not been told all the details, she could not but see that she had acted unwisely. She would have been ready to admit that she was altogether in the wrong had it been any one else besides Royama who had intervened. As it was Royama, she somehow could not feel grateful to her for rendering her act of folly innocuous.

"I did it as we say in England for a jest which must be my excuse, Rajah," she said rather lamely.

Her repentant mood had its fascination. It was as attractive in its way as her wild daring of the day before.

"Your western jests are sometimes deadly," he answered.

"Please forgive me!"

The look that accompanied the prayer was not conducive to the calming of his feelings.

"I only desire to be your friend—as I always was—as I always hope to be. I don't want to put stumbling-blocks in your path." Then changing to a less melting mood she added in the old tone of good comradeship, "I am apt because of past days to forget that your Highness sits on your father's throne."

The assumption of the ceremonious manner of the subject in the presence of the sovereign, half real half chaff, stirred him into warmth.

"I, too, forget it when I am with you," he said quickly.

"Remember it now, Highness. Let us forget yesterday's folly——" He made a movement as if to protest, but she stopped him by a gesture. "Tell me if you have really finished all these ceremonies. They must be very repugnant to a man of your education. Are there any more?"

"Thanks to Miss Gopaula's action, no—unless——" he stopped; it was impossible to mention the Dewan's request.

"Unless what?"

"Nothing!"

He had checked the confession that another degrading function awaited him. She divined the cause of his hesitation and was sorry for him.

"I gathered from Ted that all the necessary rites were concluded," she said, laying stress upon the word necessary.

"That is so."

With a sudden assumption of real entreaty she said—

"Then, Rajah, be firm, and refuse to submit further. You have done your duty. Let them be satisfied. Remember your school and college training and make a stand against the superstitious practices demanded of you in the name of caste and religion. There may be some, I admit, that are absolutely needful and expedient. But where they are optional, put your foot down firmly and take the first step towards an emancipation that your successors will carry on. They will be everlastingly grateful to the man who had the courage to take the initiative. You are not a worshipper of idols like the people over whom you rule, are you?"

"No; my religion is a theistic philosophy, Hebraic in some of its features," he replied moodily.

"Then maintain your philosophy; stick to it by all means, but resist idolatry."

"Idolatry!"

He looked at her with a vague wonder. Had she heard of his intended participation in the sacrifice of blood to Karlimaya?

"As I drove out to the Residency with Mrs. Constable, yesterday, I passed a party of men with a sick child. The bleeding head of a cock lay before a stone. At the moment we went by the whole party bowed down before the stone. They were your people, Rajah. There is a saying "Like people, like priest." I say, "Like people like prince." Your father may have found it expedient to associate himself with the practices of his subjects. I ask you because of your training to keep aloof from such orgies. They are degrading and only fit for a rude semi-savage people ignorant of a purer and a higher faith."

"I have told you before that I am not a devil worshipper; that I have almost the same horror of blood sacrifices as you have."

"Where do you worship?"

"At one of the large temples dedicated to Vishnu. I present my offerings and the priest makes prayers for me to the Deity. I join in them as you do in yours at church. There is nothing about the ritual that is degrading. On the contrary, it is as pure and archaic as is the worship of Jehovah by the Jews."

Her eyes dwelt searchingly upon him. His words seemed to remove a barrier that stood between them. The thought of him on a plane with the Jew was tolerable; but on the plane of the idolators she had seen on the road it was intolerable. She was relieved to hear his reassurance on that point, more relieved than either was aware of. As the dark shadow of heathenism fell away from him her manner unconsciously softened. She no longer felt as if she were holding him at arm's length in doubt.

"I am so glad to hear it from your lips though I knew

in my mind that it must be so—that you could not be in sympathy with those dreadful people on the road-side."

He saw the gladness in her eyes. Was he so much to her that she should be filled with joy at the thought of their drawing near on the plane of religion? A wild desire to renounce the faith of his fathers swept over him; to stand by her side in creed as well as in culture—to suffer no barrier, religious, social or intellectual, to remain between them. A Paradise that of late had been formulating in his dreams opened its gate before his dazzled eyes and he could not speak.

"I am glad to know that your religion is not like the religion of those poor idolators," she continued. "Promise me, Rajah, by our friendship in England as well as in India, that you will never be tempted by that well-meaning, but mistaken old Dewan to descend to anything of that kind. It would be retrogression in your case. Men like you should rise to better and nobler things for the sake of posterity, even if it requires some sacrifice. Promise me, Rajah!"

The tone was infinitely tender. What man could resist such pleading. Certainly not the Rajah. He took the hand she held out.

"I promise! for your sweet sake, I promise, Delphine! My Queen! You give me wings to lift me to better and nobler things. Oh! that the gods would give you to me altogether! Life would be——"

"Stop! say nothing that will destroy our friendship. It is as your friend that I can best help you. Any other thought is madness—madness!"

She withdrew her hand and pushed back the chair on which she had seated herself.

Like a man who suddenly sees his treasure slipping from his fingers he sprang to his feet.

"By all the gods of my fathers let it be madness—the

madness of joy, of love, of happiness unspeakable! I know now what it is that my life needs to make it complete. It is you, Delphine!—you! you! you!"

At his passionate words she too had risen from her chair. She stood with one hand resting on the back gazing at him, fascinated, spell-bound. Now, as yesterday, fear did not enter into her mind. With each repetition of the pronoun he approached nearer and yet nearer, until the hand she raised weakly, ineffectually to keep him at bay, touched his breast.

"It cannot be!" she murmured brokenly.

"It can be! it shall be!" rang in her ears with a masterful triumph.

The silence was broken by the noisy fall of a pot outside, just beyond the verandah. Delphine started violently. The Rajah, who was also startled strode into the verandah and looked out into the garden. He could see nothing. Possibly the careless gardener had fled in his fright at the mischief he had caused. A large pot of arum lilies was lying overturned, the broken bits of pottery scattered.

The sound of approaching footsteps held him to the spot. He knew it could only be Ted. As the latter came under the portico he noticed the broken pot beyond.

"Hallo! who has been smashing our best arum lily, I wonder?"

He went up to the spot and examined the damage.

"Dropped by the idiot who was trying to move it," was his comment.

Raising his voice he called Daniel, and on the appearance of the butler ordered him to send one of the gardeners to repot the plant before it faded, and to water it well.

He mounted the steps under the portico in leisurely fashion, and strolled into the drawing-room where he found Delphine lying back in an easy chair, silent and abstracted. The Rajah was still in the verandah, leaning

on the balustrade and looking down at the broken pot with a frown on his forehead.

"Has his Highness been telling you of the plans he has made, Delphie?" he asked, handing his sun-topee, stick and gloves to an attentive servant.

"For the second durbar? No."

"For our visit to Calcutta. He wants me to go; and has given me several errands to do for him; and he suggests that you should come with me. You know I ordered that damask to be sent down at once. They write to say that they have only half the quantity we require and must send to England for it. We can't wait all that time; so they suggest that we should choose another pattern. They have only four or five pieces of the length wanted."

"Awkward; as we sent the patterns back immediately," said Delphine, her eyes wandering in the direction of the Rajah.

"If you come up with me we can choose another at the shop; and if we don't like what they have in stock, we can go on to another upholsterer—always supposing that His Highness will leave it to us."

The Rajah, hearing himself alluded to, turned abruptly from the balustrade and re-entered the room. He seated himself in the chair he had occupied before, and with an effort pulled himself together. He shot a swift glance at Delphine and said—

"It was the object of my visit this morning, Miss Dersingham, to ask you if you would mind running up to Calcutta with your brother and giving him your advice on the various commissions he is to do for me."

She raised her eyebrows slightly, the only sign of the surprise she felt.

"I will go with pleasure if I can be of any use."

"You will find the journey quite easy, whether you

travel by the night or day mail. It will be pleasanter for you to be with your brother than to be staying here at the bungalow alone," continued the Rajah.

Ted glanced from one to the other, vaguely wondering what their conversation had been about. No suspicion was awakened in his mind that other topics might possess a greater interest than Delphine's visit to Calcutta. That the Rajah was not himself was apparent. He attributed the abstraction to other causes, and was more convinced than ever that a change of some sort was needed. He determined not to let the matter rest. With regard to his sister's trip he added his word to the Rajah's.

"You had better come with me Delphie. You will enjoy seeing Calcutta."

"By the time you return," said the Rajah, addressing Ted more than Delphine, "I shall be free to attend to matters that concern us personally. There is the shikar expedition."

"And the polo; and I think we might manage a gymkhana and possibly sky-races," rejoined Ted, cheerfully. "A little of that sort of thing would do us all good."

"You might bring back the cups for the races, Miss Dersingham. Will you choose them? Don't forget that Shivapet is rather florid in its tastes."

"Come up and choose them yourself, Rajah," said Ted.

Delphine's eyes seconded the invitation.

"I won't make any promise. We shall all be going up to Calcutta about Christmas, when Government takes a holiday, and the place is *en fête*. You will be off not later than to-morrow night, I suppose."

"Can you be ready, Delphie?" asked Ted.

"Quite easily," she replied without much enthusiasm.

She was puzzled at the eagerness shown by the Rajah over their departure. She knew nothing of the inner

workings of the zenana; and had no suspicion of the fears overshadowing the Prince. Why did he wish to get rid of her at that particular moment? What was in his mind? Perhaps after all he intended to follow but did not wish to appear too anxious. Her mind was in a chaotic state, and she scarcely knew whether she wished him to follow her or whether a change such as was proposed would not be good for both of them.

"Very well," said Ted. "We will leave by the night mail, and I will write for a reserved compartment for you, Delphie, at once. Your ayah will travel with you in the ladies' carriage."

He did not go immediately to his room where writing materials lay ready to hand, but remained seated. The conversation flagged. Ted glanced at the clock.

"Your Highness is due in the audience chamber a little before the sitting of the council to meet the Political Agent."

"Then it is time I was off. Will you kindly call up the brougham."

Ted went into the verandah, and the Rajah took Delphine's hand and lifted it to his lips.

"We shall meet again on your return, if not before. Till then may you be preserved in safety, best beloved."

Her answer was in her eyes. He joined his secretary in the portico, and Delphine in a strange dream of unreality retired to her room.

Arrived at the palace the Rajah sent a message to the Dewan to the effect that the feast of Karlimaya might take place on the morrow as arranged at eight o'clock at night. No word was said as to his presence there. The Dewan was left in doubt as to whether he had prevailed or not.

The state of the Rajah's mind as he drove away from the bungalow was like Delphine's—chaotic. Emotion in the oriental leaves no room for calm consideration. Like a typhoon it sweeps everything before it, no matter how

destructive its path may be. Desire must be fulfilled; consequences may be dealt with—afterwards. The Ranees had roused his fears. He had taken measures to place the object of their animosity out of their reach. In Calcutta, Delphine would be safe. Excuses could be made for keeping her there until their attention was diverted to some fresh object; and thus his desire to place her in safety would be fulfilled.

Another desire was to put an end to the wearying ceremonies and free himself temporarily of the yoke of State. As the traveller in the glare and heat of the desert longs for the cool recesses of the forest so he longed to escape from the fierce light of publicity—to retire into privacy and revel in his freedom. He resented this last demand of the Dewan that he should be present at the temple feast; not so much because the rite was degrading and beneath the dignity of a modern educated man who rose superior to demonolatry; but because he deemed it unnecessary and the overtaxing of a willing worker. It was time that the worm turned.

With exemplary patience he had complied with the demands of the pujaris, the Dewan, the Resident, and with social calls upon his time. The moment for relaxation, nay more, for reward, had arrived. The hope of how that reward should come was his own secret. It was vague in means of accomplishment, but definite in character—a retreat, a companion, a blessed period wherein days and nights were not counted, where state and royalty were forgotten.

Then came a vision, seductive and alluring, of a man in evening dress, a woman in soft cloud-like white by his side, flowers, lights, music, the gentle air of the Mediterranean blowing round them. In a world of luxury and culture they two would be alone and far from the reach of an exacting Dewan, a jealous purohit, a spying bevy of ignorant

women, and a critical punctilious English official. The vision was intoxicating. It left no room for doubt, nor for the contemplation of the great factor in civilized men's lives—public opinion; nor did it allow for an instant the consideration of the difficulty of overcoming the anomaly of a mixed marriage.

In education and in dress, as well as in other habits, the Rajah had broken away from the groove in which his father had lived; but underneath the modern erection stood the old foundations, the inheritance of a long line of ancestors whose creed was the swift, reckless gratification of all desires.

As the Rajah of Shivapore entered the audience chamber and ceremoniously greeted the Resident, no one would have guessed, least of all the precise official with his high ideal of duty, that the blood of his forebears was stirring in his veins. Ambition that was neither political nor social had been fired. It was unthinkable that the end of that ambition should not be attained.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THERE was no ride that afternoon. Ted was busy at the palace answering letters and preparing for his departure the next evening with Delphine. Later the Rajah required his presence to explain his commissions in detail. When the interview was at an end, the Ranees, having heard that he was about to start for Calcutta, sent for him to give him their commissions. He was aghast at the list, and began to wonder how long he would be kept at the Presidency town before he could fulfil them all.

Delphine despatched a note to Mrs. Constable asking her to tea, and suggesting a drive afterwards, an invitation that was promptly accepted.

At three o'clock she heard the sound of Royama's bearers. The book she was making a pretence of reading was thrown aside and she went into the verandah. It was with a strange mixture of feeling that she greeted her visitor. Her generous nature prompted an expression of gratitude for the service Royama had rendered the day before in removing the scorpion. On the other hand the Rajah's praise of the Hindu girl was not forgotten. The fact that she had intervened still rankled although she could not deny that a great service had been rendered by Royama.

She was too well bred to allow any sign of resentment to appear in her manner. As Royama stepped out of the palanquin under cover of the enormous umbrella that her faithful body-guard thought fit to unfurl, Delphine advanced

with outstretched hand and led her guest into her own little boudoir.

"Ah! We have had such a morning! How quiet your bungalow is after my mother's rooms!" exclaimed Royama, as she curled herself luxuriously into a cushioned lounge. "Delphine! it is a pity that you do not eat *pan supari*, the concoction of leaf, betel-nut and condiments that we enjoy. These comfortable chairs were made for it. Have you never tried it?"

"Never; and I have no inclination," replied Delphine, with decision.

"It is strange how you English people dislike to adopt the habits of any foreign country in which you may have to make your home for a time," said Royama, contemplatively.

"We are what is called insular; and rather proud of the fact than otherwise."

"Yes, that is so; and being so I have often wondered why you are anxious to make foreigners who come to your country adopt your ways."

"We consider them worthy of adoption."

"A matter of opinion. You will not mind if I eat a little betel?"

"Yes! I should mind! Oh! Royama! don't chew that horrid red stuff, it looks so dreadful."

"Right-oh! as your brother says. I will put it away till I get home. I feel as if I wanted soothing. We have had such a terrible morning."

"What do you mean? Has there been an accident?"

"No; it was my eldest brother's wife who made all the trouble. She is very sensitive and jealous."

"Of her husband?"

"No; of me!" she replied complacently. "I go frequently to the palace to see the Ranees. I come here. I went to the Resident's garden party. That was the last load of hay that broke the camel's back."

"The last straw, you mean. How did she show her jealousy? Was she cross and disagreeable to you?"

"Oh! dear no! She cried and screamed and lay on the floor and kicked. We tried all we could to comfort her; but she would not be comforted. Poor thing! I was so sorry for her!"

"Surely she gave way to what we should call temper, and behaved very foolishly," said Delphine, in surprise.

"It would have been foolish perhaps in an Englishwoman. I remember Mrs. Clark and Carrie were always telling me that well-bred women never showed their feelings. In this country it is different; it is considered quite right and proper to say what you think, and show what you feel. We do not all behave like my sister-in-law. It is what you call a matter of temperament. My brother's wife is very sensitive, very easily upset. And, oh! poor thing! she is so exhausted after it that she cannot eat her food. She has had no dinner to-day, even though mother prepared something especially for her and begged her almost with tears to eat."

Delphine could not pretend to feel much sympathy. She remarked coldly.

"She should learn to control herself."

"She has never been able to do that because of her temperament. It was very sweet of her to be jealous of me," said Royama softly.

"Perhaps she thought that your brother would give her her liberty if she cried."

"She knows that it can never be. She would not be happy with it. There would be still more kicking and screaming and crying if she saw how people stared and heard remarks they made. Only yesterday Kangra Rao said in my own hearing that I was as free as a cooly woman in the road."

"That was very rude of him. We should consider it

the height of bad manners to repeat such things in the hearing of the people themselves."

"It is not thought bad manners with us to make personal remarks."

"Did you kick and scream when you got home?"

Royama laughed merrily. "It is not my temperament to kick and scream."

"Your English education has taught you better."

"Different—not better," corrected the patriotic Hindu girl.

"I am glad you have not forgotten what you learned in England."

"We do not forget."

"I hope you do more than remember all that Carrie and her mother taught you. How do you spend your time now you are back in your Indian home?"

"I get up very early in the morning, because it is our custom. I am usually the first to run to my mother when she rings the bell for morning prayer."

"Do you have prayers every morning?"

"After our fashion. My mother sings a hymn and takes out the little brass image of the god Krishna that she has always used. I fetch some marigold or oleander blossom. She places the flowers with a little rice, butter and sugar before the image, and she asks the god to be good to the household during the day. It takes only a few minutes. Afterwards I have a cup of tea or coffee with some toast, because I like toast, and am used to it. Then I have a nice quiet time for reading and study. There are plenty of people to do the house-work so I need not trouble myself about it. Later the ayah comes and brushes my hair and helps me with my toilet. While she is arranging my hair she talks and tells me all the gossip that the kitchen women have brought from the market, about the palace and the doings of the English and the happenings in the bazaar,

whether the buniya has been quarrelling with his wife and why."

"You let her gossip?"

"Why should she not? She is most amusing."

"But she is a servant."

"And also a relation. Then I go into the kitchen where my mother and sisters-in-law are busy looking after the women. We all dine at midday, the men by themselves, we with our mother. Afterwards some of us go to sleep, because we get up so early; but only for a short time. To-day I have come to see you. Sometimes I pay a visit to the Ranees, or to one of mother's friends. Sometimes we drive out. In the evening there is another meal, and after the lamps are lit we talk, and perhaps play a game of pachesi. We all go to bed early."

"I wonder what good your English education did."

"It taught me to talk nicely with others, and not to hang my head like a child. It taught me to read; and to look at things sensibly; not to think too much of evil omens and superstitions; and—and——"

"Not to go into hysterics," added Delphine.

"Not unless I have occasion."

"I don't think you are hysterical or nervous, Royama, or you would never have seized the scorpion on my dress as you did yesterday."

"No; perhaps not."

"Nor have saved the Rajah from breaking his caste?"

It was the first time his name had been mentioned, and Royama became suddenly silent. The smile vanished and the lips closed firmly. Something in her expression seemed to challenge the English girl to defend her action.

"I was sorry you interfered. The Rajah was longer in England than you were. At heart he is British. His habits, learned there, are firmly established. I was hoping

that I might persuade him to make a stand against the old-fashioned ways of his father. One of the first steps towards it would be to accept our hospitality."

"He can keep his English habits without breaking his caste. He continues to use a knife, fork, and spoon for his food. He dresses in English-made clothes; and he sits on chairs, and not on cushions on the floor as his father did. There is no harm in all that," allowed Royama.

"If he is so civilized as to adopt the habits of an educated European it must be very repugnant to him to submit to all the superstitious rites demanded of him in the name of caste. Let him retain his Hindu philosophical faith if he likes, as a Jew would retain his religion; but surely it is not necessary for him to descend to practices that the western world would deem degrading."

"It is all a matter of opinion," said Royama. "The eastern world, in which you must remember we are living sees no degradation in caste ceremonies or the rites of our creed. Nothing can be more degrading, more objectionable, more lowering to self-esteem in our eyes than your habit of eating food prepared by the hands of outcastes. Knowing you English as we do, we recognize your good points, and we overlook your outrage of our caste sensibilities. You should return good for good, and not condemn in us practices that do not find place among yourselves."

"I don't think I condemn them generally in your nation."

"You would condemn them individually—in me for instance."

"If they were degrading—yes."

"And in the Rajah?"

Royama glanced at Delphine under her long lashes with sharp scrutiny. Beneath the simplicity of the modest Hindu maiden dwelt the complex Hindu mind, far reaching in its working.

"Yes," replied Delphine, frankly. "For instance, I may say that I did not like the part he had to play in the durbar."

"That was not degrading," exclaimed Royama in surprise. "Far from it! For the time being he was the swami himself."

"An assumption that is either blasphemous or foolish. I could not credit him with wilful blasphemy; therefore I could only regard it as folly to pose as the deity. I admit that he may have been forced into it; but I wish he had stood firm and resolutely refused to occupy a position that made me laugh."

"Delphine!" cried Royama in distressed protest. "You don't appreciate his wonderful goodness, his nobility, his greatness! As he stood there, his body the ark—you call it—of the deity, we who saw him were filled with reverence, with gratitude, with joy; that his beautiful body should be deemed worthy to be a resting-place for the deity. You don't understand—how can you?—the ecstasy that filled the crowd. I could have thrown myself before him in my love and joy, in my worship and adoration. I envied the dust that his feet touched, the jewels that rested on his breast!" She clasped her hands and swayed with emotion that she did not try to conceal. "And then, Delphine, to see you the next day with your careless laughing manner trying to tempt our beloved Prince to abase himself by drinking coffee prepared by pariahs! Oh! it was terrible." She buried her face in her hands as if to shut out the sight. "That was degradation if you like! a deed unworthy of our swami Maharajah!"

Delphine heard her in silence, unconvinced and even unimpressed.

"We look at these matters from a different point of view," she said a little coldly.

Praise of the Rajah from that quarter had the effect

of irritating her. The fact that she could find no reason for her irritation did not serve to allay it.

"Quite true!" rejoined Royama in eager agreement. "You do not love him as we do; he is not your prince."

"No; he is not my prince; he is my friend, my best friend for whom I have a great regard. If he were my prince he could not be my friend. It hurts me to see any friend of mine behaving foolishly. I am not sure that the sight does not endanger my friendship. Naturally with the Rajah whom I have known for several years, I have no wish to see it jeopardized."

"I wonder what you would think of him," said Royama, slowly and with deliberate purpose, "if you saw him at the heathen festival that is to take place to-morrow at the temple just outside the palace gate."

"I should not see him there," replied Delphine, confidently.

"If you attended the feast you would."

"I am quite sure that he will not be there," said Delphine.

She laughed incredulously as she spoke. Light as it was the laugh nettled her companion more than a little.

"I am equally certain that he will attend the feast. His father never failed, and he will not fail. He is too good, too noble to refuse. He will show the people that he loves them, and is in sympathy with them as a true prince should be."

The ring of certainty in her voice roused Delphine into further contradiction.

"He is different from his father. I know him better than you do. I saw so much of him in England. He hates these idolatrous festivals as he has told me more than once; and he will not encourage them, whatever his father may have done before him."

"Delphine! Will you go yourself and see whether I am right or wrong?"

"How could I be present at such an affair?" asked Delphine in surprise. "It would be impossible."

"Not at all. Close to the temple there is a little rest-house. For the sum of ten rupees, perhaps less, the temple people would allow you to stand there. They would lower a bamboo screen which you would see through sufficiently to recognize the Rajah, if there, without being seen yourself. It would be perfectly safe. Oh yes; you need not be afraid. Others have seen it from the same place in days gone by. I have heard my father say so. There is no caste to consider. At the temple of Karlimaya all castes including the outcastes worship together. Do go; you will find it immensely interesting."

As she spoke Delphine's eyes grew bright. The suggestion appealed to her spirit of adventure.

"Will you come with me?" she asked.

"I can't. My father won't allow me to go. You must take your ayah. You can easily slip out of your compound. The temple is close by and when the pujah is over you can as easily get back. It is not more than fifty yards to your gate."

"When did you say the feast was to take place?"

"To-morrow night."

Suddenly Delphine remembered her visit to Calcutta. "By-the-bye, I was forgetting our plans. My brother and I are off to Calcutta by the night mail."

"In that case of course you can't be present. Perhaps it is as well. You might think it rather a horrid sight, as you have not been accustomed to it. We are used to such things. Blood-sacrifices are common enough among the lower classes."

"Do the people really believe in the evil spirit?" asked Delphine.

"Why not? You English believe in an evil spirit though you do not think it necessary to propitiate it with pujah. What our people do in their ignorance they do in good faith for they know no better. It is not for us to say they are wrong."

"You don't go to the temple of Karlimaya, I hope."

"I was there only a fortnight ago," replied Royama, without hesitation. "One of the ceremonies by which my caste was restored was the feeding of beggars at the temple. I fed fifty poor men with my own hands."

"You did not like it, did you?"

"It gave me a very satisfactory feeling such as perhaps you feel when you have been to church."

"And you were not disgusted?"

"Not in the least; I was full of virtue. Now tell me what are you going to do in Calcutta?"

The conversation turned to matters less momentous than caste and Delphine explained the reason of the journey.

"Can I do anything for you?" she asked good-naturedly.

"Will you be so kind? I want the largest doll you can find. If you can get one with the body modelled in composition as well as the head I shall be glad. I should like to give it to the third Ranee. She has spoilt the one I brought from England by bathing its saw-dust body."

They chatted of shopping, a subject not by any means monopolized by women of the West. Royama discovered that she had several commissions as soon as she had found in Delphine a willing agent.

At the hour named Mrs. Constable appeared and Royama departed. As she was leaving, Delphine said—

"I am going to ask a favour. Will you take care of Peter for me while I am away?"

"I shall be delighted."

"Your mother won't object?"

"I know that she will be very pleased to have him. I am not sure that we shall let you have him back," she added, laughing, as she petted the dog and made much of him.

It was arranged that Royama should come for him the next morning. At the same time she would bring a pattern of the satin she required, and the full title of the book to be bought.

As Delphine entered the drawing-room the tea-tray was brought in. Following close upon the tea came Ted. He was longing for his tea, and in a hurry, having still several things to do at the palace. He greeted Mrs. Constable and then turned to his sister.

"I say, Delphine, I'm afraid I shall have to go on ahead to-morrow. You can easily do the journey by yourself with the ayah. I have secured a ladies' carriage for you, and there is no change. In any case I should not be allowed to travel with you, so it won't make any real difference if I start to-morrow morning instead of in the evening."

"What advantage do you gain?"

"I get the whole of the next day for my shopping. The Ranees have given me heaps of commissions as well as the Rajah. As long as I remain here they will go on adding to their shopping lists, so the sooner I am off the better. I'll meet your train in the evening in time for a late dinner. Daniel will come with me."

"Where are you going to stay?" asked Mrs. Constable.

"At the Rajah's house."

"Are you going there by yourselves?"

"Yes; the Rajah is not coming, if that is what you mean," replied Ted, who never beat about the bush. "I wish he could come. He's got another ceremony of some sort to attend to, I believe. He's getting too sick for words of all these affairs. A run to Calcutta would do him no end of good."

"All the same, I should not propose it if I were you," said Mrs. Constable.

"That's exactly what I did; but he said no; it couldn't be managed."

"Rajahs are not encouraged by a paternal Government to leave their States. He was wise to say no."

Ted looked at her across the tea-cups. "It strikes me that if they don't take care they will have a catastrophe in their experiments. In this case they are putting new wine into an old, a very old bottle. Either the wine will be ruined or the bottle. I hope it will be the latter."

"I trust it will be neither," said Mrs. Constable, warmly.

"I don't think the old bottle called Shivapore can take much harm if the new wine does burst out of it. What the Rajah wants after all this pow-wow is a change, a little decent society. Even I feel a bit hipped for want of the company of young men like myself."

"The Rajah won't find that sort of thing at Calcutta. The English society there is too official to be really genial to a native prince."

"Then he ought to be sent to England every year for a short period just to give him a real holiday where he could get into touch with his old chums who would treat him courteously, but as an equal. Two months or even six weeks would be enough to put him on good terms with himself and lay in a fresh stock of endurance needed for the running of this antiquated little State. We've had our experience with Rajahs in the past, and have heard more than enough about reversion to type and all that sort of thing. The authorities can't plead ignorance."

"It is what usually occurs," said Mrs. Constable. "I don't see how it is to be prevented. It is inevitable."

"There I disagree with you," replied Ted, hotly. "It is by no means inevitable in Narayan's case. It need not happen if the powers that be have sufficient discernment not

to throw him back entirely on himself, and allow him to be poisoned by the atmosphere of the zenana and the palace. There's no escape from it, situated as he is with the Ranees under the same roof, the Dewan in his pocket, and those pujari people at his elbow."

"Talking of change," said Mrs. Constable, who found that she was on delicate ground with the private secretary. "Don't you think it would be a pleasant change for Delphine if you left her in Calcutta for a spell. The season is just beginning. She would enjoy the dances, dinners, gymkhanas, and other gaieties."

"How odd! Harlesden made the very same suggestion to-day when I met him after the council."

"I am not surprised," said Mrs. Constable, without turning a hair. "It is a very natural thought to us old Indians that young people in India should be where the band plays and the flags fly. I have an old friend in Calcutta who would gladly give the invitation. What do you say, Delphine?"

She had been unusually silent since Royama left; and now she smiled in dreamy fashion.

"I came out to keep house for Ted. I don't see why I should neglect my duty for so-called pleasure. I am very happy; I haven't been here long enough to feel dull."

A carriage came up to the door and Delphine ran away to put on her hat and gloves.

"I don't think I know this turnout," remarked Mrs. Constable as she stood in the verandah waiting for Delphine.

"It's quite new; came down from Calcutta last week," said Ted.

"Your's or the Rajah's?"

"The Rajah's of course. He won't allow me to buy any carriages or cars for myself—says the secretary always has the run of the palace stables and garage."

"There has never been a European secretary before."

"Hasn't there? Oh! well! it is easier to say yes in Shivapet than no."

"H'm! so you have found that out!"

"I'm finding out a good many things as time goes," said Ted.

"And you'll find out a good many more before you're finished. By-the-bye, try and arrange for your sister to stay on at Calcutta. I will write about that invitation to-night."

Delphine appeared and they got into the carriage. The impatient Arabs sprang into their collars and prevented the Doctor's wife from hearing Ted's reply.

CHAPTER XXV.

The rooms occupied by the Rajah were furnished in European fashion. His sitting-room had the usual lounges and tables required for the comfort of civilized man. Books and newspapers lay about as if they were read. Writing materials were at hand on the writing-table.

The dining-room was such as might be seen in any Englishman's dwelling, comfort being evident without a display of the florid incongruities which mar the appearance of some houses belonging to Indian gentlemen.

The food was served by caste servants on a perfectly appointed table laid out with handsome silver suitable for a man of his rank. Sitting at a dinner-table instead of on the floor after the manner of his ancestors did not preclude the performance of the Hindu grace before eating and drinking—an oblation as well as a thanksgiving.

In the same manner his ceremonial ablutions were in no way hindered by the use of a comfortably-fitted bath-room. Considering how free from domestic ritual his life in England had been, it was to his credit that he had adapted himself so readily to the orthodox caste routine. The lessons of his childhood, assisted by heredity—a powerful factor in the East whatever it may be counted in the West—enabled him to settle down into the old groove with tolerable ease. As long as the rites were strictly private and connected only with his daily life, there was very little irritation; he overcame his repugnance and submitted to the inevitable with as good a grace as he could summon

for the occasion. He required to be reminded at first as the different hours came round for prayer and contemplation, for ablution and oblation; but thanks to the instructions of the Dewan, some one was always at hand to save him from the sin of forgetfulness and omission. The Hindu domestic ceremonial seems to make large demands upon the followers of the faith; but the rites have the merit of being short and easy of performance.

In carrying out the public ceremonies he was less happy as was evident in the case of the religious durbar. His residence in England had given him an acute sense of public opinion formed from the European point of view. In India immutable prejudice founded on tradition takes the place of public opinion; and he found it extremely difficult to reconcile his cultivated sense of what was due to the dignity of the individual with the antiquated observances of remote generations. He did his best as we have seen to overcome his repugnance, and conform to the ordinances of religion and state by the sacrifice of personal inclination.

A factor in his present life that had a considerable influence was his virtual isolation in the palace that was henceforth to be his home. Princes with their entourage seem to be the centre of attention; yet as a class they are apt to suffer from loneliness. The Rajah realized the sense to its fullest extent; his secretary dimly divined it; but his own people overlooked it altogether. Ever ready to kow-tow to their Prince, to flatter and to bear him company, they would have been astonished to hear that he pined for companionship; that he missed with a vague ever-increasing regret the friends of his exile.

Delphine herself would have been surprised, after her ineffectual attempt to break his caste, could she have learned how intensely he longed to join them sometimes at their cozy little meals. As he sat by himself before the

array of china, glass, and silver in the palace dining-room, he recalled the fun of the breakfast-table, the merriment at late dinner when a guest or two besides himself had dropped in, the informality of lunch and tea at which the company could help themselves without a servant gliding in to anticipate requirements and render self-help impossible. It was all irrevocably gone—as long as he remained an inmate of the palace supporting the dignity of his position.

There was nothing in the routine of the palace to correspond with these bygone pleasures, scarcely recognized at the time as pleasures, so common was their occurrence; nothing to compensate for their loss. For the rest of his life he must take his food in solitude and in the silence observed by orthodox Hindus, waited on by obsequious servants, in whose very bearing was a constant reminder of the state that surrounded him.

Isolated by his position, he sometimes in moments of depression thought of Ted with secret misgiving lest he too should slip away from the old friendly footing. No wonder that he longed intensely to set every tradition of caste at defiance and go across to the bungalow uninvited, sure of a warm welcome, and seat himself at his secretary's dinner-table. In the irresistible intimacy of a family the old friendship would be restored.

He forced himself to put the temptation aside, to beat it down ruthlessly, and to recall to mind his circumstances. Perhaps later——. A lapse under certain conditions might be worth the penalty involved in the subsequent restoration of caste. It was this alluring, undefined hope that buoyed him up in the performance of his duties, in the patient submission to every rite imposed.

Of late a new anxiety had arisen, but this would be relieved as soon as he could be sure that Delphine had left Shivapet. It was advisable that she should be out of reach

of the machinations of the Ranees, at any rate for a time. It was even more desirable that she should be absent during this last repugnant ceremony which was to take place in a few hours.

Whether he could avoid attending it remained to be seen. He fully intended to persevere in his refusal; but his nature was compliant rather than obstinate; and if the Dewan were insistent, he might see no other course than to give way. It was of no use to refer the matter to the Resident. Harlesden, he knew, would side with the Dewan without a moment's hesitation. Ted would counsel compliance also. It was Delphine alone who sympathized and supported him in his antipathy to the blood sacrifice. If she fully understood the obligations of a time-honoured national institution, would she be so ready to condemn and to preach open rebellion?

It was early morning of the following day. At seven o'clock Ted called at the palace by appointment to receive the Rajah's final instructions. He found him dressed in a light morning suit, the only oriental part of his costume being the turban, without which in these days Ted never saw him. Though the Englishman knew that the abundant crop of short black hair was gone, he did not realise how greatly the appearance of the Prince was altered.

In the bright light of the early day before the blinds were let down to exclude the glare of the sun, the Rajah's face looked anxious and careworn. For the first time Ted was struck by the lines about the mouth and forehead that he had not observed before, and he was concerned to see the traces of work showing so plainly. Stopping suddenly in his occupation of filling in cheques for the Rajah to sign, he looked up at him from the writing-table, and said impulsively—

"I say, old man, I wish you would come up to Calcutta with us!"

Never since they had left England had Ted used this particular term of friendship that was once often on his lips. It startled the Rajah.

"Do you really mean it?—Ted!—Do you really wish me to come with you? Does—does Delphine wish it?"

"Of course she does!" replied Ted without hesitation. "She'll be as glad as I shall be to shake off this fusty old atmosphere of state in which we have been living. In Calcutta our old chum, Narayan, might come to life again, and we should get rid of this incubus, the Rajah of Shivapore, who with his Dewan sits heavily on our shoulders."

The use of Delphine's name did not escape the secretary's notice. In their boy and girlhood days it was common enough between them. Only of late years had the custom been dropped and the more formal terms employed.

The Rajah's eyes dwelt wistfully upon the Englishman as he spoke. The lines faded and the lips moved with a happy smile. It was of short duration and died out even as he replied.

"The temptation is great, but escape is not to be found that way. My shadow would follow me. I should arrive with a salute. Wherever I went the booming of guns would pursue me. My coming and going would be marked and recorded in the daily papers with yours also as my secretary. No; it is privacy I want; not the full glare of the Viceroy's court. That has to come later, whether I like it or no, when I go to Simla."

"Can't you be incog.?"

"With Mr. Harlesden here? Impossible; we must think of some other plan when you come back if I am to get my wish." He caught his breath with the suspicion of a sigh. Between the wish and its fulfilment lay a thorny track. "I hope Miss Dersingham will find the house

comfortable. As my deputy, please see that she has everything she wants, just as if I were on the spot to play host. Give her my kind regards and best thanks for helping me with my troublesome shopping."

"You won't look in at the bungalow to-day?"

"I shall not have time."

"Now I come to think of it, she will not be there. She is lunching with Mrs. Constable and will not go back till late in the afternoon. She will dine at the bungalow, and the carriage will take her to the station directly after dinner."

"Which carriage have you ordered?"

"The big one that brought us back from the station the day she arrived. It holds the luggage. The Ranees will not be wanting it. Since they have had their family-coach motor they have refused to use the old carriage."

The Rajah sat down and put his signature to the documents Ted had prepared. There was no time for further conversation. With a warm grip of the hand they parted, and half an hour later Ted, with Daniel the butler, were speeding as fast as a motor could take them to the station. The day mail was caught with five minutes to spare.

The Rajah was right in refusing to carry out the suggestion made on the spur of the moment by his private secretary. Calcutta, with the Viceroy in residence at Covernment House and several other native princes staying with their suites in the great Indian capital, was the last place to choose for a retreat into private life. The appearance of the ruler of Shivapore in company with his secretary and secretary's sister would be sufficient to give rise to all sorts of questions. The Rajah knew, though Ted did not, that a paternal Government might think it advisable to make a change in his *personelle*. It was also possible that the vexed question of his speedy marriage to

the daughter of some prince or nobleman might be re-opened with hints and viceregal advice which it would be difficult to disregard.

He was allowed little time after the departure of his secretary for the contemplation of his troubles. The Dewan sent in a petition for an interview, which was granted. It was longer than usual, and the Rajah's patience was sorely tried by the persistence of his prime minister. When at last Chakravarti took his leave—without having accomplished his purpose—a deputation from the town followed close upon his heels with the same request. Finally an urgent message came from the Ranees, praying him to go to the zenana at once. Their requests were always of an imperative nature, demanding instant attention. He went to hear what they had to say, well aware beforehand what its nature would be. One and all repeated the same prayer and to all alike he gave a refusal.

Outside the palace gates preparations for the festival of Karlimaya began with daylight. Venetian masts of rude construction, sufficiently gaudy in colouring to please the uncritical eye of the spectators, were planted round the temple in such a way as to form a boundary preserving an open space in front. Wreaths of sacred leaves were festooned in all directions, with here and there a streamer of red or white. Every niche in the walls had its lamp, a cresset of oil with a floating wick, ready to be lighted at sundown.

The face of the building had been colour-washed in crude stripes of red and white, and the platform in front of the temple had been similarly treated. From the earliest hours a few idlers looked on at the preparations. As the day passed the numbers increased until quite a crowd gathered on the spot. Groups of men, women and children seated themselves under the shade of the trees. Many of them had come in from the country, travelling all night

in bullock-carts that progressed at the rate of about two miles an hour.

Soon after midday a party of men with tomtoms were stationed outside the door of the temple. They drummed fitfully one at a time, relieving each other every fifteen or twenty minutes.

In the course of the afternoon several carriages drove up bringing people of importance with their offerings. Other worshippers with less pretentions arrived in bullock-carts and pony-jutkas. No one came empty-handed; no matter how small it might be an offering of some sort was ready for presentation as soon as the server of the temple appeared. No haste was shown over the bestowal of the gift; no calling for the attendant; no hurrying away after the ceremony. The worshippers intended to make a day of it, a holiday of which every minute from start to finish was unalloyed enjoyment; whether they were only listening to the tomtoms and horns, or whether they were looking at the anticipated sight of the young Rajah doing pujah to the image of the dread demon as chief pujari. No doubt crossed their minds about his presence at the feast. Good luck for the whole year, not only for himself but for his people, was to be the certain reward of his service. Was it likely that he would neglect so important an act?

Now and then a temple server with shaven head, body bare to the waist, and white muslin loin cloth flowing in soft folds round his lower limbs, issued from the building carrying a wicker tray. He advanced to one or other of the family groups and solemnly received the offering—grain, sugar, butter, fruit and vegetables—with directions from the donor, always the head of the family, as to the particular request to be addressed to the goddess on his behalf. Sometimes it was for renewed health in a sick child, the prosperity of a new venture, the ensurance of

good crops next season, the safe return of one who was travelling on a long journey.

The gossip ceased for a few minutes, and all eyes were directed towards the pujari with eager curiosity to discover the nature and value of the gift. Then, as the man disappeared, the company resumed the thread of conversation, and tongues wagged till the fitful tomtoming was well nigh drowned. Overhead the sun shone, warming the air that blew softly through the trees. The bright plumaged birds hopped in and out of the golden light, catching insects as unconcernedly as on ordinary days when they had the place to themselves except for the occasional passer-by. Now and then a tawny frittillary butterfly floated on the wind from one of the gardens near and sunned itself on the broad glossy foliage of the banyan. Light and colour lent beauty to this scene of placid enjoyment; and no shadow of anxiety in the past or future marred the happiness.

The image of Karlimaya was to be brought out after the sun had set. Demons in India are supposed to have an antipathy for broad daylight. It is not until the earth begins to cover herself with the shadow of twilight that malignant spirits, such as Karlimaya, awake into activity. In preparation for her advent two women appeared with brooms to sweep afresh the space around the platform. They were under the supervision of a temple attendant who directed their operations and was supposed to see the work properly done. Just as they had begun their task, Kangra Rao arrived in his carriage. He was followed by two other gentlemen, Sankaram and Muniswamy Iyer. They greeted each other ceremoniously and advanced towards the temple taking up a position in front of the door near the platform. Behind them followed their retainers, each carrying a basket holding the offerings of his master.

The sweepers stopped from their work to stare at the noblemen, who waited to present their gifts in person that

good luck might be secured for themselves and their families. Whilst they waited they were not above having a gossip like their poorer neighbours. Having stared at the new-comers for the space of a couple of minutes, the women at a word of warning from the maistry resumed their brooms, and moving side by side, they gossiped as they swept. Their supervisor seized the opportunity to question the men, who carried the offerings, as to their masters' circumstances and the value of the gifts.

"Then all is at an end with regard to the Rajah's marriage. It is a pity," said Sankaram, a stout, simple-minded man of the old school, who had never left the State even to go as far as Calcutta.

"The Dewan is not in the best of tempers about it," said Kangra Rao, smiling.

In his opinion it was an ambitious scheme. The proposal would have been more seemly if it had emanated from the Rajah himself.

"His anger matters not now. When the tiger's teeth are drawn and his claws are cut who fears his snarl?" remarked Muniswamy Iyer, an old man who never abandoned the hope of one day seeing the revival of the ancient regime, such as had existed under the late Rajah. It was his confident belief that all in good time the new lights called gas and electricity would come to an end by a process of exhaustion; the water supply would dry up, having no deep wells; and the horseless carriages would prove unmanageable as soon as the demons that propelled them became tired of their work.

"It is a pity," repeated Sankaram. "The girl is suitable. She is modest like most of our women and silent. What more can a husband desire than silence and modesty."

His voice was drowned by the clamour of the sweepers who were waxing warm over an argument.

"I tell you that my husband said——"

"Pah! who cares what your husband said or any other woman's husband? We all know what they say when the food is not to their liking."

The other was not to be silenced by such a sweeping and contemptuous statement. She whisked her long broom viciously from side to side and retorted.

"He said men were telling the news everywhere that the Presence had refused to do pujah to the image to-night."

"Shooh! Who cares what a man says when he is abroad among other men! The market women from the palace zenana this morning told the rice merchant that the Presence would be here to-night. With his own hand will he present the offering and garland the image. Not only was it the word of Amabai and her women, but it was also said by the women belonging to the house of the Dewan."

In the warmth of their dispute they had ceased sweeping and were facing each other with combative looks as though the hair-pulling period was not far distant. The maistry thought it time to interfere. With a push to emphasize his words he drove them apart, sending one to the extreme right and the other to the left thus making conversation impossible.

"The Rajah desires something different in a wife. A child will not content him. His eyes have been too long upon the women of England," said Kangra Rao. "The newspapers say that these English women do as they please without consulting their husbands or even asking permission."

"It is because the bamboo does not grow in England," remarked old Muniswamy with a snigger. In his antiquated opinion there was only one way of managing the sex.

"It is further reported in the papers," continued Kangra Rao. "That the great Dewan of England himself runs away from their presence when they would speak to him of business."

The women deprived of the opportunity of gossiping gave their undivided attention to their work. They swept so industriously that their task was finished all too quickly for the inattentive maistry. They met in the centre of the space and the group of men had to move to avoid the touch of their brooms. Again the maistry intervened with apologies to the honourable gentlemen and an assurance that the women were caste servants of the temple.

"There is no doubt that His Highness intends to choose his own wife," said Sankaram, when the women had once more been pushed aside.

Again Muniswamy Iyer sniggered. "Let the son choose his horse if he likes; but his mother must choose his wife if there is to be peace in the zenana."

"In England the sons make their own marriages without help from their parents," observed Sankaram.

"And what is the result?" asked Kangra, the student of the press. "It is said that the men of England spend their youth in choosing their wives, and their age in devising laws whereby they may get rid of them without killing or incurring penalty."

At this juncture one of the palace carriages rolled by carrying Delphine back to the bungalow to finish her preparations for her departure that evening. The three men turned and looked after it as it swung through the gateway into the compound.

"If the choice is left to the Rajah we know where it will fall," said Sankaram, with a fat smile.

"Where?" piped the old man.

"On the English girl, the sister of the secretary. She has bewitched him. She can do as she pleases with him, even as the driver can master the horse or the bull."

"You do not know the English," said Kangra. "She is a Christian and he is a follower of the Vedas. I have read in the papers that no legal marriage can be made between

a Christian and a Hindu unless the one embraces the faith of the other. The Christians may admire our philosophies; but for all that they cannot become converts of any importance, because they can never attain to caste not being born in it."

"The Rajah will never become a Christian," said Sankaram, with conviction.

"If he be his father's son, and be set upon a thing," said Muniswamy Iyer, "not even the gods may turn him from obtaining his desire."

A purohit appeared on the temple steps. At sight of him the sweepers sidled away followed by the maistry. The three noblemen advanced beckoning to their attendants to bring the baskets forward, containing offerings which they duly presented, not forgetting to mention their requests like other worshippers.

CHAPTER XXVI.

Delphine found on her return to the bungalow that little was left for her to do in the way of preparation for the journey. The ayah had completed the packing; and the cook with the assistance of the table-servant had faithfully carried out Daniel's instructions regarding the furnishing of the tea and tiffin baskets. It only remained for her to change into her travelling-dress and to eat her dinner as soon as it was ready.

She had spent the day with Mrs. Constable, and there had been ample time to discuss all kinds of subjects. More than once the name of the Rajah was introduced—always by Mrs. Constable; never by herself. Somewhat against her will she was led to speak of his present position, and to express an opinion that his entourage was not conducive to the development of his character on the foundation laid by his English tutors and guardians.

"The line must be drawn hard and fast at a given point or he would be denationalized," declared Mrs. Constable.

"It seems to me an absolutely cruel process," said Delphine with some warmth. "It amounts to creating tastes at an age when a man is most impressionable, and as soon as they are ineradicably established, denying him the gratification of them."

"It was not intended that he should become a European altogether," said Mrs. Constable.

"Yet that is just what appears to have happened."

"I think not. George!" cried Mrs. Constable to her husband in a sharp voice that made him jump.

"Mary!" he responded mildly.

"Do you believe that the Rajah is in every respect a European?"

He smiled as he answered; he knew the oriental nature better than Delphine knew it.

"Not in every respect. For instance if he goes to the temple feast to-night as his father always went, no one seeing him would be in any danger of mistaking him for a European. When he is with Englishmen he is to all intents and purposes an Englishman, so amenable is the Asiatic temperament to outside influences. When he is away from that influence and surrounded only by Hindus, he is a Hindu, orthodox and caste-respecting. I admire the man immensely; he is an out-and-out good fellow. I hope nothing will occur to upset the balance and make him reckless."

Mrs. Constable glanced at her husband with quick warning. No good would come of dropping hints. Delphine was not in the least likely to take them. Apparently his arrow fell wide of the mark to his wife's relief.

"According to your showing, Dr. Constable," said Delphine, anxious to vindicate the character of the Rajah and at the same time prove herself to be correct. "He has a double character. I don't see how a man can be a good fellow, as you call him, if he is one thing to one set of people and another to a different set. The Rajah would like to be consistent, and to live the life he lived in England; but you all combine from Mr. Harlesden and the Dewan downwards to force him back into the old groove. You should hold out a helping hand to steady him on the new ground instead of pushing him back."

"If he were a private individual," said Dr. Constable, "it would not matter. He might if he chose become an

Englishman in everything but colour and name. It would have its penalty of course."

"What penalty?"

"Denationalization—loss of country," replied Mrs. Constable, promptly. "An insuperable difficulty against a change of country is his complexion. With his Asiatic colouring no one would ever recognize him as an Englishman. His children, if he married an Englishwoman, would be half-castes, neither English nor Hindu. It would not be until the third generation that nationality would be unquestioned, although all the rights of citizenship might be enjoyed by him and his sons."

"You understand, Delphine," added Dr. Constable, after a slight pause, "how necessary it is for a man in the Rajah's position to maintain his nationality. Above all it is absolutely incumbent on him to marry a woman of his own race, his own caste, and his own creed."

"There is a chance of finding him a suitable bride, Mr. Harlesden tells me," said Mrs. Constable, once again on thorns.

"Where?" asked Delphine.

"In Mysore—some relative of the Maharajah of Mysore. The alliance would be an honour to the State of Shivapore, Shivapore being smaller and of less importance than Mysore.

"I hope she is an educated woman who will be a suitable companion to the Rajah," said Delphine.

"A Rajah does not look for a companion in his wife," said Mrs. Constable.

"I don't see why he should not enjoy her companionship if she is intelligent and sufficiently educated."

"Have you paid a visit to the zenana yet and been introduced to the Ranees?" asked Dr. Constable.

"It has only been talked of so far, but never accomplished."

"If you could see how the women live there, you would

understand why the companionship of husband and wife does not enter into the marriage scheme in India."

"A beginning might be made," said Delphine, again stirred by what she considered their deplorably easy acceptance of present conditions.

"Possibly," he allowed. "But first find your educated woman with sufficient tact and strength of character to introduce innovations without stirring up a hornet's nest of opposition."

A name probably occurred to all three, but it was not mentioned for various reasons. Delphine put it aside with a touch of secret irritation, suspiciously like a twinge of jealousy.

"And when found I, for one, should not envy her the task of reforming those four prejudiced old Ranees," said Mrs. Constable.

The mention of the widows turned the conversation into safer channels, and she started off to relate her husband's latest adventures in the zenana. The Ranees had sent for him to cast a devil out of a girl, the Hindu devil-drivers having failed. He treated her for hysteria, and his success gave him an embarrassing reputation. He was daily besieged by friends and relatives of lunatics. They brought their cases with them and prayed for instant treatment. It was useless to say no. They encamped in the compound, or just outside the gate, and refused to budge until the devil had been exorcised.

"I think of putting up a board," said Mrs. Constable, with a grim smile at her husband. "Devils cast out here. For terms apply to Dr. Constable, Residency and Palace Surgeon. We might make quite a little fortune and retire five years sooner than we anticipate."

As Delphine drove past the temple on her return home she looked out of the carriage window with all the curiosity

of a stranger in a heathen land. There was nothing alarming to be seen in the streets. The crowd, except for the constant chatter, was well-behaved. The people had the happy expression of holiday-makers who were intent on getting all the fun that was possible out of the occasion.

The oriental, whether he be Hindu or Muhammadan, is perfectly content to sit still and watch the movements of others. He is frank of speech and ready to tell his own business; and he shows no reserve in asking questions concerning the affairs of others. When personalities are exhausted or cease to be interesting, the ruling prices in the markets and the extortions of the grain-dealers and money-lenders afford an endless subject for discussion.

However large a crowd may be in India there is no crush unless for some unforeseen reason a panic occurs. The strong take up the best positions; the weak are resigned to occupy a back seat at the show, and count themselves lucky if they catch glimpses through the chinks in the human wall that stands between them and the spectacle. They who have no view at all content themselves with the graphic description and running commentary made by the more fortunate.

As Delphine's eye passed over the assembly gathered together round Karlimaya's temple, any little qualm of nervousness that she might have felt about the proximity of an Indian crowd vanished. She recalled Royama's suggestion that she should go and see the pujah and judge for herself whether there was anything disgusting in it.

The only obstacle in the way was her own departure from the scene of action before the hour fixed for the ceremony to take place.

After a glance at the arrangements of the ayah she changed her dress, assisted the woman to lock the boxes, and sent her off to complete her own preparations. The bungalow had a deserted appearance that was slightly

depressing. She missed Ted with his cheery voice and ready laugh at trifles. She missed Daniel and his quiet unobtrusive attentions. Now he was gone she realized how faithful and constant he was in his attendance, never far from call, and often moving about the inner rooms within sight and hearing in case he was wanted. Then there was the dog. Peter was always at hand, ready for a game of hide-and-seek, or to go through his variety performance for her benefit. That morning before she left to go to Mrs. Constable, Royama had come in her palanquin and carried away a very suspicious and sad little animal. She displayed tempting bits of sugar in vain; he was not to be deceived; and the reproachful brown eyes that he turned upon his mistress for her faithlessness in thus handing him over to Royama to whom he owed no allegiance haunted her still.

The noise of the tomtoming in the road, the blowing of an occasional horn, the cries of the vendors of sweets, fruit, and milk, the penetrating whine of the beggars, and the babel of the multitude reached the bungalow. She wondered what the Rajah was doing. Were his ears assailed by the same noises? and did the drumming and horn-blowing, and shrill human voices round Karlimaya's shrine get on his nerves as they seemed inclined to get on hers?

Until the hour arrived for her to start she must bear it as best she could. For him escape was possible. He might take a long drive into the country by motor car. She had heard him say that it afforded him relief and soothed his nerves—temper he called it—when he had had a trying day. It was to be hoped that he had followed this course and that he had so arranged his drive that he would not be returning to the palace until the pujah was over.

She took up a magazine and tried to interest herself in a short sensational story; but it failed to attract. The

real had so much more in it to occupy her thoughts, whether it was speculation over the doings of the crowd or the contemplation of all that had fallen from the lips of Dr. and Mrs. Constable regarding the Rajah.

The sun had just set, and the bungalow, shaded by its deep verandahs, was becoming dark, too dark to read with comfort. The lamp would be brought in presently she supposed ; but if it came, she was in no mind to continue reading. She flung aside the magazine and rose from her chair. An additional wave of sound was wafted in at the open door. A thought struck her. Why should she not utilize the idle hour that hung so heavily on her hands by going at least as far as the open gateway of the compound to watch the passers-by ? She put on her hat and quietly strolled down the carriage drive passing out into the road. No one spoke to her or came close to stare at the stranger. All were too intent upon the more attractive sight of the image of the goddess which was being brought out from the temple. Encouraged by the absence of any difficulty of progress she moved on towards the shrine, stopping halfway lest her presence should be observed and resentment felt, if not by the people themselves, perhaps by the pujaris who were conducting the ceremonies.

It was a fascinating picture in the golden lights and deep blue shadows of the sunset glow. A haze of dust rose from the tread of many restless feet and curled up towards the flaming sky. The gay holiday clothing of the crowd, the glossy green leaves of the pepul and banyan trees under which the little group of buildings stood, the freshly colour-washed temple, the red tiled roof of the rest-house opposite gave brilliant touches of colour unlike anything she had seen elsewhere.

A brougham drawn by a single horse emerged from the palace entrance. She glanced at it with a quickening beat of the pulse. Did it contain the Rajah ? If so he would

probably stop at the sight of her. The occupant signalled to his coachman who pulled up, and out of the carriage stepped—not the Rajah, but the Dewan. He advanced with the evident intention of speaking.

A long coat of dark red satin reached almost to his ankles, hiding the muslin drapery that clothed his lower limbs. A neat turban covered his shaven head, and in it he wore a jewel of value, but without the aigrette of feathers plucked from the crest of the love-lorn bird. On the long aristocratic fingers sparkled diamond and emerald. He bowed and touched his forehead with the tips of his fingers as he came up.

"Will the lady pardon my boldness in venturing to speak?" he asked in English. "You are looking at the people who have gathered for the feast of Karlimaya, Miss Dersingham. May I show you the image? It has just been carried out of the temple and placed in position on the platform."

Delphine's eyes shone with the unexpected pleasure of finding a reliable guide under whose wing she might satisfy her curiosity and see the preparations, though she might not witness the heathen festival itself.

"It would be very kind of you, Dewan Bahadur, to take me round; and, of course, I should like to look at Karlimaya's image if my presence will not give offence."

"Why should it, when the goddess welcomes all alike no matter what their caste or their faith."

He led her towards the temple, the inquisitive crowd almost silent in their wonderment at the sight of the strange couple. Men, women, and children made way with deep respect. The Dewan had only to wave his hand and they fell back on the top of each other, never withdrawing their eyes for a single instant.

Kangra Rao and his companions had departed each to his own house to take the evening meal. Later they, with

many others, would return to see the ceremony through to the end.

She stopped before the image. It was a crude representation of a thick-lipped woman. The eyes were focussed in such a way as to create the impression that she was looking at something beyond the sight of ordinary mortals. The mouth was curved into a cruel smile devoid of pity, or of love or beneficence, or indeed, of any of those qualities of mercy that are associated by Christians with the Deity. Although barbaric in its modelling it was a clever personification of evil—not a clumsy stupid evil, but a deep, far-reaching wickedness that appalled in its immensity.

"How hideous! What a wicked face! And the people call that a god!" said Delphine, whose eyes were attracted whilst her whole being was repelled.

"We use the same word for a deity, whether it is a manifestation of good or evil," explained the Dewan. "Karlimaya is an evil manifestation."

"Indeed! she looks it!" Delphine could not help saying. "And they are going to propitiate this representation of evil with a blood sacrifice to-night."

"After immemorial custom, lady. In the old days the Rajah himself condescended to present his offering with his own hands."

"But this the present Rajah has refused to do, I understand," she said, looking at the Dewan for confirmation of her words.

His eyes dwelt upon hers with keen scrutiny. "You are right, Miss Dersingham. He has refused; though why I cannot understand."

"His training has made all these superstitious rites repugnant. They may be all right for the common people of the town who do not know any better, but the Rajah—and you——?"

She looked up into his face with sharp inquiry. He replied at once unhesitatingly.

"I shall be present without fail. I have not missed the ceremony for fifty years; not since I attended it with my parents in the days of the present Rajah's grandfather."

"As a spectator, Dewan Bahadur?"

"No, lady, as a worshipper. It is a pity that you cannot be present also and see for yourself how simple and inoffensive the ritual is."

"As a worshipper I could not possibly be present. If I were not starting this very evening for Calcutta, I might be here as a spectator."

A man issued from the temple, his dress proclaiming him to be a pujari. He could not speak English, and he addressed the Dewan in his own language. From his manner Delphine thought that he made a request.

"What does he want?" she asked.

"He begs that you will leave a small offering of money for luck now that you are here. It is unlucky to look upon the face of Karlimaya empty-handed."

For a few seconds she considered the question. She had no wish to identify herself with the worshippers, yet she had travelled sufficiently to understand the merit of paying "her footing." She drew out her purse and presented the man with a ten rupee note, a gift that was a surprise and caused his eyes to gleam with pleasure. He made a salaam and retired into the building already darkened inside by the rapidly approaching twilight. The Dewan led the way up the steps of the rest-house."

"You have a good view of the scene from here. By-and-bye the space will have a dense circle of men, women and children. They will be kept back to the line of the poles."

Again she was tempted to regret her inability to stay and see the festival. Standing on the top of the steps of

the chuttrum she was raised about six feet above the platform on which the image was placed. The platform measured about eight feet square, and three feet in height, and was situated exactly half way between the two buildings.

"There might be time, just time before starting," he said.

"Impossible, Dewan Bahadur. I must wait for another opportunity."

She was about to descend when her companion laid a detaining hand upon her arm.

"Wait one moment, Miss Dersingham. Here is a worshipper with his offerings. You will see the ritual; it is very simple."

The man carried a basket in which were rice, sugar, fruit and butter. The pujari who had received Delphine's present, came out again and took the basket. A small portion of the various contents were laid on the platform before the image in company with other similar representations of gifts. The donor repeated his request, prostrated himself, and then stood up and waited for the return of the pujari with his empty basket. He cast his eyes towards the chuttram, and seeing the Dewan and the English girl there he made a low salaam.

"Who is he?" asked Delphine.

"Some servant who knows you by sight."

"Why doesn't he go into the temple with the pujari?"

"He is of no caste, a pariah."

"I understood all castes were welcome at the temple of Karlimaya."

"Here, outside, they are welcome; but they may not pass the threshold."

"Yet they have his offerings inside, though they won't admit him."

"And with them his sins. He leaves purified whether he remains for the ceremony or whether he departs now."

The pujari came back with the empty basket and gave it to the man promising that his request should be granted. The Dewan made a sign and he joined them as they stood there.

Darkness had enveloped temple, palace, and city when Delphine returned to the bungalow. The lamps were lit and the table laid. She called to the servant.

"Bring dinner as soon as you can and tell the ayah I want to speak to her."

The woman hurried to the servants' quarters grumbling after the manner of the domestic all over the world. She was disturbed in her mind.

"The missie giving orders like the Rajah only," she said. "It is a pity the master did not wait and travel with us. He alone could put sense in the missie's head."

CHAPTER XXVII.

The Dewan drove straight back to his own house after he had seen Delphine safely inside her own compound. He intended to take his evening meal, corresponding with the dinner of the Europeans, a little earlier than usual, so that he might attend the festival.

He had permitted no modern innovations to upset the old order of eating his food. In silence he partook of the curry prepared under his wife's personal supervision, first offering an oblation to his god with a grace that was a tribute to the deity, and a prayer that the food might be blessed.

The door of the great kitchen where he sat was carefully closed lest any contamination should enter, a dog, a European, an outcaste. He and his sons, nephews and brothers-in-law, stripped of all clothing to the waist, sat on a fine grass mat and ate their food. Neither fork nor spoon were required. The Dewan used his fingers, neatly and deftly enough, and his family followed his example. No one spoke; the meal was not a sociable function, but a real religious rite. At its conclusion a sip of water was taken by each one in turn as he finished, and he repeated a short grace.

Instead of lounging sleepily on the verandahs until it was time to turn in, the numerous male members of the family put on their coats and turbans again with the intention of attending the evening's tomarsha. The

Dewan, accompanied by one of his sons, strolled towards the temple, the rest of his family straggling after him at their pleasure.

The night air was cool and fresh. On ordinary days at this hour the road with its wayside temple and rest-house was deserted, except for the single guardian attendant who, having lighted the lamps in a few of the niches near the door, dosed on the steps.

To-night a very different scene met the eye. The exterior of the temple was illuminated with numberless cressets of oil. The soft yellow lights flickered in the night wind, leaping up and down, but never going out. The credulous multitude, to whom the sight of so much light was marvellous, believed that the demon spirit herself caused the restless twinkling. It was her method of intimating that she was pleased. Did she not whisper in the trembling foliage of the big pepul tree? Was not each aspen-like leaf with its attenuated point a delicate ear by which an evil-loving demon like Karlimaya might hear all that was said? The women and children who kept themselves in the background shrank still further out of sight behind the men lest the goddess, whose only pleasure was in tormenting human beings, should mark them down as her prey.

Their faith was aided by the spectacle of the image seated in their midst on the platform. A great change had taken place in its appearance since Delphine looked with disgust at the idol. Then it had only just been brought out and it was unadorned. Now it was resplendent in all its panoply of religion. The face and limbs were encased in gold platings. Jewels hung about the neck and arms; over the shoulders rested a gold-embroidered cloth that gave a semblance of life and sex.

The shining metal reflected a thousand restless points of light; and the hard lines of the cruel face were accentuated by the sharp modelling in the metal. The

uncertain illumination from the lamps and torches occasionally carried past helped to create the delusion among the spectators that the head moved slightly, and that the smile relaxed into a frown as a worshipper, less favoured because of his less munificent gift, presented himself before the platform.

The gaze of the demon was ever towards the palace. Who was she watching and waiting for ? asked the children of their parents, hushing their shrill voices lest they should be heard by Karlimaya. The answer was always the same. For generations it had been handed down ; and what had been learned from other parents was repeated now with a faith that never doubted nor distrusted.

Karlimaya was watching and waiting for the Rajah. Like a bride she was decked with gold and jewels for his sake. The desire for him went out with the power of an irresistible spell, and whether sleeping or travelling, eating or talking, he must feel it and obey the call. Long, long ago she had centred her affection on the ruler of Shivapore, and she remained faithful to her love, protecting him from evil in each rebirth as she had protected and saved the first Rajah of bygone days from the death-dealing foot of the mad elephant. Then with lowered tones the women bade their children be patient and never cease from watching the golden face. Assuredly, when the Rajah came in obedience to her summons, they would see the lips of the image smile, and her eyes brighten in her joy.

A large gold and pearl-embroidered umbrella was opened and fixed above the idol. The platform was covered with offerings ; not in bulk but in samples. From every gift had been taken a small portion, no matter how trifling it might have been, a pinch of grain, sugar or camphor placed on a green leaf and laid on the altar. The task was not left to one man alone or it might not have been completed till past midnight. A band of pujaris were in constant

attendance after the idol had been brought out, and the platform was piled. Immediately in front of the image a small space was kept clear to receive the last and greatest and most acceptable gift bought with the money bestowed by the Rajah.

Although the worshippers looked for his coming with the utmost confidence, the Dewan's eyes were directed towards the palace with an uneasiness he could not conquer. He had done his best to persuade and to coax, but at every interview the answer had been uncertain, with now and then a simple refusal. Threaten he dared not. He had already discovered that the young Rajah had a will of his own. He was not to be forced into any line of action. The only chance was persuasion ; and one of the strongest arguments he could urge was an appeal to the goodness of heart of Shivapore's ruler. For his father's sake, for his people's sake much had been accomplished. This mainspring of action was not worn out, and the Dewan had plied it for all it was worth.

A carriage from the palace passed into the compound of the bungalow. A little later it returned with a pile of luggage. Inside sat the secretary's sister with her ayah. She was starting early ; the night mail for Calcutta was not timed to leave Shivapet for nearly an hour hence, and the drive to the station took but twenty minutes. However, the train with the reserved carriage would be ready at the platform on her arrival, so there was no reason why she should not leave the silent bungalow for the more cheerful scene.

Delphine glanced out of the window as the horses moved slowly through the crowd, and caught sight of the golden image. It seemed even to her unsympathetic eyes as if the gilding had endued it with life. The malignant expression of the face was undoubtedly intensified. As she gazed a procession approached, heralded by the drumming of

tomtoms, the blowing of horns, and the melancholy wailing of wind instruments made of dried gourds.

Foremost walked the musicians, and close at their heels came the head man of the temple, the mahunt, an important person, who did not consider that his position necessitated a residence at the insignificant little temple itself. He had built himself a house on a portion of the temple land, a fertile district lying in a well-watered valley some miles distant from the town.

Surrounding the mahunt in no particular order were other dignitaries from temples elsewhere, together with the pujaris, who lived in Shivapet and devoted themselves solely to the service of Karlimaya. They were similarly clothed. Their heads were shaven except for the long lock of hair left upon the crown by which they would be caught up to heaven after death ; and they wore neither moustache nor beard. A white muslin loin-cloth was bound about their hips in close neat folds that exposed the leg from the thigh downwards to their bare feet. On their breasts ashes formed into a paste were rubbed in unsightly blotches, which had a meaning for those who were initiated into the mysteries of Hindu sect marks.

To the crowd they could not be otherwise than awe-inspiring ; for were they not the mediators between the worshippers and the divinity ? To the English eye they presented a very different appearance in their semi-nudity. It was as well that the secretary and his sister had not elected to remain over the festival. The half-civilized demonolatry of Karlimaya's worship could not have failed to repel rather than attract.

Behind the group of pujaris and temple men came an elephant. Its forehead and ears were painted in gaudy patterns, green and yellow predominating. Its body was covered with embroidered cloths, and on its back was a silver howdah, unoccupied. The trunk moved restlessly

as the mahout obliged it with reminders from the goad to keep up a constant trampling with its big shuffling feet, whether it progressed forward or remained stationary. The pace of the procession depended entirely upon the musicians, and haste was not in their programme. The movement caused a constant ringing of the bells that hung down from the animal's shoulders.

A number of tomtom-beaters and horn-blowers and men carrying lighted torches followed in the train. They marched without order, a law unto themselves, the performers on the horns and drums blowing and tomtoming when they pleased, and without reference to the playing of the musicians in front.

The crowd opened and made a lane for the passage of the procession which passed out into the open space before the idol. The elephant raised its trunk and salaamed to Karlimaya. The pujaris prostrated themselves whilst the instruments spoke in the wildest hubbub. At a sign from the mahunt the elephant was made to back out through the mass of worshippers with a loud trumpetting that rose above the noise of drums and horns and pipes. The wailing and throbbing and melancholy skirling died away in the direction of the palace. Numberless eyes followed the sound as the multitude stood, as only an eastern multitude could stand, patiently waiting with confident expectation. Even the golden face with its staring unwinking eyes seemed to be listening in fierce unrelenting anticipation for the coming of one who would be made to rue his failure to keep the appointment.

The Dewan, a striking figure in his jewelled turban and coat of deep red satin, grew more anxious as each minute passed. Would his many pleadings prevail with his Prince? He had left nothing undone, unsaid, even to prostrating himself and touching the Rajah's feet with his forehead.

Like the Dewan, the Rajah had eaten his evening meal. It was his custom to read afterwards and to retire early. This evening after he left the dinner-table he sat without his book, listening to the same varied sound that Delphine heard. It fell on his ear with increasing insistence, and with a subtle invitation in addition, that had not appealed to the English girl. During dinner he had been conscious of the unwonted stirring of life round the temple; but the noise had only come fitfully. After the business of eating with its accompanying ritual was over and the last prayer was said, his attention was rivetted by the drumming of the tomtoms and the long notes of the horns.

They awoke memories of his boyhood and recalled scenes that he had forgotten. He remembered his childish delight and excitement as the hour drew near for his father to be carried forth in the silver howdah. The painted caparisoned elephant came up to the palace and waited for the beloved of Karlimaya, swinging its trunk and shuffling with its big feet on the gravel in impatience to fulfil the behest of the goddess.

He had stood in the verandah attended by his servants, and listened to the elephant bells as the obedient beast moved under the command of the mahout, snorting and showing sign of respectful impatience.

Presently from his dressing-room the old Rajah issued, followed by the pujari whose privilege it was to assist in his preparations. The robes of state were laid aside; the royal turban with its jewelled aigrette no longer covered the head. Bare to the waist; bare from above the knees to the soles of the feet, no adornment whatever, but the smear of sacred ashes on his breast and the amulet that his mother had bound upon his arm when he was a child, his father walked solemnly forth to obey the call of the goddess.

The elephant salaamed yet again and knelt to receive

her rider. The Rajah stepped into the howdah. The pujari followed and opened the state umbrella, holding it aloft in the darkness of the night as a sign of royalty. The elephant rose; the bells jangled and the Rajah was borne away. Then the boy was lifted on the shoulders of a stalwart old Jemadar of the body-guard and carried to the feast of Karlimaya. From this point of vantage he had a clear view of the presentation of the royal offering and the distribution of the sacrificial rice, which was to bring a blessing to all those on whom it was bestowed.

In those days the ceremony was nothing more to him than a weird mysterious show without meaning, but with penalties attached if its details were not properly carried out. By the light of the present day it had a deep significance, not for himself for he rose superior to superstitions, but for his people. It represented a marvellous faith, far-reaching in its effect on the multitude; a credulity of incalculable power inextricably connected with their well-being. On it rested their prosperity, their happiness and contentment.

In the midst of his musings the sound of the elephant bells fell on his ears. The animal had come as it came of old, the very same animal upon which his father had sat, the son of the mahout who had driven the old Rajah sitting on the neck.

He sprang to his feet undetermined yet ready to take action as soon as action was demanded of him. His quick active brain was busy balancing the question with cool, calm judgment.

Delphine had asked him, begged him with entreaty behind which lay undefined penalty not to attend any idolatrous festival. She had not specified any particular ceremony; it was sufficient to speak generally. She had her reasons, good enough on the surface without going very deeply into the matter. They were of a personal nature, and

did not include the wider question of the benefit of the community, a question that was being brought to the notice of the Rajah with increasing frequency.

Against Delphine's request was the supplication of the Dewan, who in the name of his people prayed him to be present. The reason given by the Dewan was not personal. He pleaded in the name of the community for something that would benefit the community. A concession had been made to the desires of the caste people in the religious durbar. Now a concession was looked for on behalf of the masses. In the due performance of both these rites lay the hope of the nation, a hope that was to carry them safely through any unforeseen and equally unavoidable public calamity. Drought and famine are two lurking demons that can never be successfully exorcised from the length and breadth of India. Their greatest ally is panic and depression.

It was to prevent such a visitation of the gods that the Dewan pleaded and the Rajah listened; whilst a sense of duty urged that if this end were attainable by a simple action of his own, he had no right merely on account of personal prejudice to withhold it. The request of one who did not properly comprehend the case should be set aside in favour of the prayer of the many.

As he stood thus debating within himself, the pujari entered and prostrated himself at his feet. No words were necessary. The man's attitude was in itself an entreaty. His decision was made. Delphine should hear of it afterwards. He would tell her himself and he was convinced that he could persuade her to regard the matter from his point of view. Not only would she say that he had acted rightly, but might even commend his action. In describing the ceremony he could give the scene his own colouring and soften its barbaric crudeness. Already the carriage had gone to take her to the station, and by this time she

would be settling herself down for the night in the train preparatory to starting on her journey.

He bade the pujari rise ; and without a word he retired to the very room that had once been his father's. There he submitted to the ritual which had been performed by his ancestors. His clothes, the neat English dress to which he clung, the turban with the selfsame jewel that his father had worn, the silk underclothing, the boots and socks, all were laid aside and the ceremonially clean muslin cloth was bound about his loins. Nothing was omitted to complete the transformation. The lock of hair left by the barber on the crown of his shaven head was combed and oiled, and his breast was imprinted with the mark of his god in sacred ashes. Even in this disguise the fine well-developed figure retained its natural dignity and presented a far nobler appearance than could ever have been claimed for his father. The palace attendants gathered in numbers to see their Rajah depart. They noted the difference between sire and son. It would be strange indeed if Karlimaya's eyes were not delighted at the sight of her beloved coming in the freshness of his manhood to do her pujah.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

A MURMUR ran through the waiting crowd, a stir of excitement that intensified with each passing minute. The Dewan glanced round for the cause. It was not far to seek. A cunning beam of light thrown by a reflector from the temple played upon the burnished gold lips of Karlimaya. The operator was unseen by the people, and he manipulated the ray in such a manner as to change the shadows on the mouth and make it appear to smile.

"See! She smiles! He is coming; he is coming!" cried the worshippers, thrilling with intense expectation. Some of the younger members actually trembled as they stood.

Now was heard again the deep clang of the elephant-bells mingling with the prolonged notes of the horn and the jubilant roll of the tomtoms. Wildly screamed the pipes in rivalry with the drums. Above them all sounded the trumpet of the elephant in the march of victory.

The Dewan drew a deep breath of relief. The Rajah, might the lord Krishna bless him! was coming as his father and grandfather had come before him in the silver howdah, garbed as a priest of his protective goddess.

"He has obeyed the call," said the voice of Kangra Rao in his ear.

"And all will now be well," responded the Dewan.

"I will join with you in that sentiment when His Highness has made choice of a wife."

To which the Dewan answered nothing. One thing at a time was enough for the old man.

Wide the ranks of the worshippers opened to admit their prince.

"Swamiyar! Swamiyar! Swamiyar!" shouted every tongue, as the silver howdah swung into the full light of the illuminated temple. The beloved of Karlimaya had arrived not as the ark of his deity as before, but as the favoured human being, the beloved of the gods, a man in the perfection of his manhood, strong and beautiful, worthy of the love of this female Asmodeus.

The elephant stopped before the image, and knelt, that its rider and umbrella bearer might dismount. Naked, with his loins girded like the pujaris, his feet bare and his breast smeared with ashes, his head shaved, he stood in front of the idol by himself, every eye upon him. Bending low he touched his forehead with the fingers of both hands by way of salutation.

Then from the temple issued a bevy of the nautch girls, for which the temple of Karlimaya was celebrated. Their clothing was of the richest silk. Jewels of gold and precious stones sparkled on head, neck, arm, and waist. Thick ropes of jasmin blossom half hid their glossy black hair, and the air was heavy with the scent of otto of rose and sandalwood.

The musicians began a measure, the tomtom beaters keeping time, and the girls began to dance. The movement was little more than a gentle swaying of the lithe bodies from the waist. Gradually the motion became more animated, and a few steps were taken on the heels. One of them began to sing a song of praise and love such as was used at marriages, untranslateable as far as English was concerned.

Their first service was rendered to Karlimaya. To her they sang and danced, posing and stepping, advancing and retiring after the manner of the nautch.

Having rendered homage to the goddess they turned to the Rajah as he stood with the Dewan, pujaris, and others, and addressed their songs of love and their dance to him. He knew it all of old, but this was the first time that he had been the centre of it all, and it moved him strangely. At the beginning he was conscious of an impulse to fly, to turn his back upon it; but that was impossible. He had set the ball rolling, and it must pursue its course to the end, whatever it might bring. Accepting the inevitable, his eyes followed the movements of the dance not altogether without interest.

The girls themselves were overjoyed at the opportunity afforded of exhibiting their talents. For months past they had been preparing for this event, and each vied with her neighbour in an endeavour to attract his notice by alluring pose and step.

The Rajah was but human and the inheritor of eastern tastes. He watched the girls with an appreciation impossible in a European to whom the nautch meant nothing but a pageant. It was only natural that the slow languorous movements should be incomprehensible to men accustomed to associate graceful activity with the name of dancing. The nautch could stir neither the imagination nor the pulse of the European.

The Rajah had not seen a nautch since he sat with his father and dropped off to sleep before it was over. He understood now why it never palled upon his father. For more than an hour the old man would sit and gaze at the girls, sleepily, yet fully conscious, never stirring a finger. The heavily lidded eyes followed every pose, every motion, whilst underneath that stolid exterior the dull smouldering fires of emotion were slowly fanned into flames. The young

Rajah watching the dance now understood. Was he attracted or was he still dead to its influences? More than one member of the crowd wondered and failed to arrive at a decisive answer. Time alone would show.

The leader of the troupe was a girl of sixteen. With her regular features, olive skin, and symmetrical figure, she was regarded as a beauty even among a troupe of women noted for their good looks. Since the time she could toddle she had been taught by her mother, a dancing woman herself, to pose and step. The long course of training had produced an adept in the art. This was the moment she had hitherto lived for. She determined that nothing of it should be lost. After due homage had been rendered to Karlimaya, she turned to the Rajah. If her performance had been perfunctory in the first part, it no longer lacked warmth and vitality. Often in the dance her arms were stretched invitingly towards her Prince; her body was flung back, showing the strip of bare waist between the skirt and bodice. She advanced with voluptuous abandon, and retreated with allurement, chanting the plaintive love song that he recognized as one of the echoes of the past.

The Dewan, silent and observant, glanced frequently at him, seeking to discover how this oriental expression of the emotions affected him. It was undoubtedly strong drink, but he kept his head. Some instinct made him turn away abruptly, and withdraw his eyes from the graceful swaying figure.

"Enough! Tell the dasis I am pleased with their dancing, and I will give a present of money to-morrow."

"Shall I send the chief dancer to the Presence to receive the gift?" asked the pujari, who had brought the Rajah from the palace.

The latter lifted his head with an imperious motion, and looked at the man before replying.

"Come yourself. The presence of a dasi is not required at the palace."

"Not yet, swami, not yet," interposed the Dewan, addressing the pujari, in a low voice. "His Highness will give his orders in his own time."

"It was his father's custom," replied the pujari, in justification.

"His Highness has other ways which we shall all learn." He lowered his voice still more as he added, "They will slough off by-and-bye, as the skin of the snake is cast when it has no longer use for it. Have patience, swami; have patience, and all things will come."

The dance had not lasted long, the Rajah having ended it much sooner than was expected, to the intense disappointment of the spectators as well as the girls. At a sign from the mahunt, the troupe retired, more than one of them in tears, and the pujaris came forward to proceed with the ceremony. After the stoppage of the nautch, it was rightly surmised that at any minute the Rajah might intimate that he had had enough of the pujah, and return to the palace. Judging from the rapidity which marked most of his actions, he was not likely to allow the rites to be prolonged indefinitely. The word was given that the particular ceremony in which he took part was to be carried out at once. After it was over he could leave when he liked without disrespect to the dread demon.

With a curious strain of what would have sounded as discords to a western ear, a pujari began to chant a hymn of praise and propitiation to the goddess. In it he drew her attention to the offerings spread so bountifully before her; and the worshippers' hearts were stirred as mention was made of the various benefits she was to shower upon them in return for her gifts.

Then came an interval when tongues wagged freely and the smoke of incense floated up under the nostrils of

the golden image. Again the lips, with a reflected point of light playing upon them, seemed to smile, as though the prayer had been heard and a favourable answer might be confidently looked for.

Two men with the long silver horns kept specially for this ceremony, blew soft melancholy notes, and the tomtom beaters drummed a slow rhythmic measure. A procession advanced gradually into the light. Foremost walked the chief pujari of the band, carrying a two-handled sword point upwards towards the sky. On each side was a man with a gong. Torch-bearers followed and in the midst of a party of pujaris was borne on high a large brass dish containing the head of a buffalo recently decapitated. Its tongue protruded, and upon its dark coarse hair shone the still wet gore. Close behind came other pujaris carrying baskets of rice red with the blood of the unfortunate animal.

The procession passed between the Rajah and the image and slowly circled round along the edge of the crowd. The men stopped frequently and raised their burdens to the full length of the arms, so that all might have a sight of Karlimaya's dreadful feast.

Then came a cry of "give! give!" and the rice was distributed. Only a few grains were dealt out into each hand; but even thus there was barely enough to satisfy the clamorous appeal of the multitude.

Next in order came the presentation of the Rajah's offering. This was nothing less than the buffalo itself. Its body lay behind the temple not yet cold. Every drop of its blood had been caught upon the rice already jealously secured by the crowd of eager worshippers. The head was to be laid before the idol as a token that the animal's life had been sacrificed to the goddess. The brass tray on which it lay was brought to the Rajah.

"What am I to do, Dewan?" he asked, for the first time at a loss in the proceedings.

"Place your hand upon it, Highness."

"Why?"

"As a token that the gift is yours."

"I thought it was understood that I took no part in the ceremony. My presence alone was desired. I am not a devil worshipper."

"Nor am I, Highness. We are only here to please the people."

"And for that reason I suppose I must do as I am asked," he replied, with something like a sigh, for he was already getting very tired of it.

Against his inclination he followed the Dewan's directions. No sooner did his fingers rest lightly on the head than he felt himself lifted from his feet and carried forward by the pujaris towards the image. His offering was laid on the vacant space, and the pujaris setting him down prostrated themselves, crying aloud in the name of the goddess. The call was caught up by the assembly and echoed again and again in a strange, vibrant tone, half chant, half cry, such as the priests of Baal might have used in the old Babylonian days when they appealed to their senseless and unresponsive god.

The Rajah's eyes were fixed on the gilded features of the image, his thoughts bridging the past, his mental vision filled with the figure of his father, garbed like himself, fulfilling the will of the people. He did not believe in the demon, yet he could not altogether discredit her power over the multitude. He was glad that tradition did not insist on a prostration on his part before the idol. His appearance there was not conducive to self-respect, especially in that unclothed condition demanded by the pujaris. But, in spite of the sense of indignity that could not be overcome, he was conscious of a certain

nobility of purpose in the situation that condoned his action and made it seem worthy.

Suddenly an unaccountable impression pervaded his mind that he was being watched; that inimical eyes were focussed upon him with disapproval. He glanced round quickly first at the temple on his right and then at the chuttrum on his left.

Standing at the top of the steps of the rest-house, her hand still upon the bamboo screen that she had pushed aside was Delphine, horror and disgust written on every feature.

Between her and the Rajah the space was clear, the pujaris having prostrated themselves as one man when the cry was raised. Across that space he and she stared at each other, he petrified at her unexpected appearance, she filled with disgust attendant on the disillusion of an ideal. In spite of his promise, in spite of his knowledge of better things, he had stooped to the lowest depths; he had forsaken his palace, his civilization to associate himself with the semi-savagery of his ignorant subjects.

It was Delphine who first found her tongue.

"Narayan! Narayan!"

Her voice quivered with reproach, disappointment and renunciation. Again she called to him.

"Narayan! Narayan!"

In the last repetition of his name he heard despair mingled with ominous condemnation.

The innate courage of the man sustained him. He was neither confused at her discovery nor overwhelmed by the thought of its consequences. Even the consciousness of his nudity failed to confound him. He felt no shame for himself nor for his people. He had been thrust into a position long established by tradition, identifying himself with his subjects for their good. She was the intruder. She was the foreigner who could neither comprehend nor sympathize with the needs of his nation.

A sense of injury and misjudgment, however, crossed his brain. With royal dignity he drew himself up to his full height and faced the woman he thought he loved.

"Miss Dersingham!" he cried, in a loud imperious voice that reached her clearly and distinctly above the murmurings of the inquisitive assembly, who understood nothing of what was passing. "Miss Dersingham! This is no place for you!"

Never before had she heard that stern tone that seemed bordering on deep and righteous anger. He turned to Chakravarti and said rapidly in his own tongue—

"Dewan Bahadur, oblige me by taking Miss Dersingham to her carriage—it must be close at hand—and tell the coachman to drive as fast as the horses can go to the station, or she will miss the night mail."

Delphine heard the rapid directions given, but, not understanding the language, was ignorant of their purport. She glanced at the Rajah, who was once more surrounded by the pujaris, but his head was purposely averted. He was gazing fixedly at Karlimaya, whose golden face seemed to wear a wicked smile of triumph. Delphine's suspicion that he was angry was confirmed, and she turned away with her romance shattered. The Dewan gave her little time for thought. He took her arm and led her through the crowd, the frightened ayah, who had been in close attendance, following at their heels.

The carriage had been drawn up under a tree at a little distance. It was the work of less than a minute to place her and her servant in it.

"I hope you had a good view of the ceremony from the chuttrum," said the Dewan, with a smile.

"It was a horrid sight!" replied Delphine, almost against her will; but something in the expression of Chakravarti seemed to force an opinion from her.

"To us it has no horror. May you have a pleasant journey, Miss Dersingham," he said, as the syce shut the door of the carriage.

She did not answer, and the horses, lashed by the coachman, sprang away into the darkness of the night.

CHAPTER XXIX.

It was as well that Delphine could not plumb the depth of the Rajah's wrath. She might have been still further repulsed and disgusted, seeing that she possessed a fastidious dislike for violence of any sort, had she realized how furiously angry her action had made him. He regarded her presence there as deliberately spying upon him. In so doing he was, of course, wrong. Nothing had been further from her thoughts; but his experience in the ways of the zenana led him to believe that this was her motive. What other reason could she have had for hiding in the chuttrum? It was to be expected of the Ranees' agents, and he was partially reconciled from custom to their watching and tale-bearing. That it should be found in Miss Dersingham was outrageous. Had he not seen her with his own eyes, he would not have believed her capable of such an action.

In addition his sense of justice was hurt. He had never given her reason to suspect him of duplicity. Throughout their long years of friendship in England he had always been as good as his word and kept faith in his promise. This was the first instance in which he had absolutely broken his promise. He had every intention of making a clean breast of it afterwards. Could she not trust to his judgment to do what was right without having recourse to such a device as this?

In his anger he forgot the fact that she had accepted

his promise without one ray of doubt. He had given her an assurance that he would not be present at a blood sacrifice as a worshipper, and she had believed him. He could not know that the sight of him there was as much a shock to her as her presence was to him; that her visit to the scene was prompted solely by curiosity, and that she had been aided by the Dewan, whose subtle mind had in sight a possible issue likely to benefit the house of Shivapore from his point of view.

He could not know also that the ten rupee note, so generously bestowed upon the pujari by Delphine, placed the chuttrum at her disposal; and, persuaded by the Dewan, she believed that the hour between dinner and the departure of the train, might very well be spent in seeing something of the wonderful festival which was convulsing the whole town of Shivapet and its inhabitants from the Dewan down to the poorest beggar.

The Rajah had acquired the art of self-control, a virtue that never belonged to his father. It was learned at school. He mastered himself sufficiently to curb what might easily have become a fit of ungovernable fury.

"Continue the ceremony," he said to the pujaris, who stood moodily at his elbow, in doubt if he would forsake them before the rites were concluded.

No desecration had been committed by the presence of the foreigner; Karlimaya's festival was open to all. There was no caste to outrage, no prejudices to offend. The crowd, surprised into unusual silence, and more than a little awed by the signs of annoyance on their Prince's face, had watched the incident with an inquisitiveness shared by the nobles themselves. Many questioning glances had been exchanged with liftings of the eyebrows. As the Rajah's command fell on their ears, doubt was exchanged for gladness and satisfaction.

It was manifest to every person present—rich or poor,

high or low caste—that the Rajah had proved himself to be impervious to the influence of the Englishwoman. This could be nothing less than the direct act of Karlimaya herself.

The pujaris were more than satisfied. They were triumphant. Their Rajah, as the votary of the goddess, had withstood the attempt of the cursed foreigner to draw him away from the faith of his forefathers, and deflect him from his duty. When the Rajah gave them the welcome order to proceed with their ritual, their gratification found expression in an inspired hymn of praise. The chief pujari burst into impassioned eloquence, using the vernacular which all could understand, instead of the old classic tongue of the Vedas. He praised the goddess; ascribed to her the turn events had taken; and glorified the Rajah for the service he had rendered to her on behalf of his subjects. It was followed by the cry that had greeted him on his arrival.

"Swamiyar! swamiyar! Maharajah! swamiyar!"

As he listened to the gratitude expressed in this fashion a ray of pleasure shot through him and lightened the anger that weighed him down. Yes! Delphine might condemn him for his heathenism and withdraw her favour. She might turn from him in disgust remembering his association with the visible blood of the sacrifice. He was inwardly conscious that he had done right. He had fulfilled his duty. He had followed in the footsteps of his ancestors and proved himself worthy of the throne he had inherited.

Wreaths of oleander blossom were brought and distributed to the principal worshippers. Kangra Rao, Muniswami Iyer, Sankaram, and Gopaula, with the Dewan, who had returned from his mission of seeing Delphine into the carriage, each received a garland and advanced in turn to the platform. With a respectful

salutation the wreaths were placed round the neck of the golden image.

Last of all came the Rajah, the frown still upon his forehead and lines of depression about his mouth. He advanced close up to the idol and looked into its staring metallic eyes.

"Peace, dread spirit! Peace! Is it possible thou canst know what this has cost me? Take what is thine own; and, if thou hast the power, grant happiness and peace to—my people!"

He threw the wreath over the glittering head, touched his forehead with his fingers as others had done, and retired.

As the elephant approached to bear him back to the palace, the Dewan asked—

"Your Highness' lips moved as the wreath was placed in position. May the goddess grant your prayer."

"I asked for peace and happiness for my people," replied the Rajah, wearily.

"May the boon be also given to their Prince, Highness," said the old man with more warmth than he usually showed.

The Rajah was touched. He sorely needed sympathy.

"Thanks, Dewan Bahadur; but I fear such benefits are not for the Rajah of Shivapore. To be allowed to look into the garden and to be driven out to live on the open maidan does not make for peace and happiness."

The Dewan was puzzled by the allusion to garden and waste ground.

"It might be possible to surround the palace entirely with garden if your Highness desires it; but the maidan has its advantages. Where else can the Bodyguard practise its drill?"

Although the Dewan failed to catch the meaning of the words, another person standing near was not deaf to

their import. It was the tone in which they were spoken that caught Gopaula's ear and arrested his attention. He looked at his Prince with a suddenly awakened sympathy, and, for the first time, felt a ray of pity for the friendless man.

In his own family he had seen how the life in England tended towards the isolation of the oriental on return to the land of his birth. The old moorings were loosened and new standards set up. Fresh ideals were formed to influence the judgment and a respect for public opinion—a purely western product—took the place of ancient prejudice.

Knowing that her father took a broader and more tolerant view of life, Royama turned to him for the sympathy that was lacking in her mother and sisters-in-law. Gratitude shone in her eyes and revealed how much she had craved for that sympathy; how it was water to a thirsty land; how without it her nature would starve and the flower of her mind perish.

As he watched the elephant with its silver howdah pass into the dim shadows of the night, the thought crossed his brain that the Rajah must sometimes be stirred by the same longing for sympathy. He had undergone a similar training. The period of his exile was thrice the number of years she had spent in England. It was probable that the old moorings in his case were more than loosened. They must have been cut away irrevocably, and the new ideals must be infinitely stronger in their influence.

Gopaula returned to his house, and was greeted by a crowd of women all clamouring for news. Nine o'clock had just struck. It was usual for the household to retire soon after that hour. To-night no one entertained any idea of seeking sleep until curiosity had been satisfied. Each had a question on her lips, and Gopaula lifted both hands in mock dismay as he encountered the vociferous demand for news.

"I shall be deafened! I shall be deafened if you all scream at me at once. Now, silence! or I will go straight to my cot and shut my eyes for the night."

His threat, though made in jest, had the desired effect. His wife patted the cushions on the floor and rearranged them invitingly. Royama caught him by the arm.

"Sit, my father. Be seated, for we expect a long story that will keep us awake till the flying foxes go home to roost."

"Tell me, husband, were there many people at the feast?" asked Gopaula's wife.

"Give us the story from the beginning, father, and leave nothing out," said his daughters-in-law.

His sons entered and also seated themselves, occasionally interposing a remark; but to Gopaula was left the relation of the chief incidents. Royama nestled by his side, rolling a tempting little morsel of betel for her own delectation, partly because she enjoyed it as the European loves the cigarette, and partly to assist her in the endeavour to be silent whilst he spoke. There were so many questions she wanted to ask which were only for his ear.

The story of the events of the evening were quickly described. When the point was reached where the English girl suddenly appeared, a chorus of exclamations drowned his voice.

"How did the Rajah take it? Was he angry?" asked his wife.

"He did not show any anger in the words he used; but we could see that he was not pleased."

He continued his story down to the departure of the Rajah on the elephant.

"When the Presence went I came home. The feast will continue for the people, as is the custom, until past midnight; but the rites are all ended. And now, wife,

it is time that your women retired. Little remains to be told, and that little can be learned to-morrow."

He rose from his comfortable seat and glanced down at the face by his side. Royama had also risen, but was still clinging to his arm. The noise of the voices of the dispersing women covered the whisper that reached his ear.

"Come into my room, father."

She drew him away towards that little chamber which played a large part in the happiness of her life, one of the privileges that her sisters-in-law envied. The busy wife and mother, occupied with the many duties connected with the retirement of her large household, glanced after the pair.

"Do not be late, daughter," she cried. Then, as her eldest son's wife seemed inclined to follow, she called her back, saying that the talk was over, and it was past the hour for sleep.

No sooner had father and daughter reached the secluded little room than Royama turned to him.

"Tell me more, more of the Presence. Was he very angry with Miss Dersingham?"

"Angry, a little," replied Gopaula.

"It was I who suggested that she should go to the feast."

"You, my daughter! Why?"

"That she might see for herself and understand that the ways of the East are not as the ways of the West; that a Prince cannot live for his own pleasure; and though he may rule his people in some things, they rule him in others. And so he was annoyed?"

"More than that; there was something more than anger and annoyance. His spirit was hurt. It put fire in his heart that she should see him thus, without clothes, turban or shoes."

"She must also have seen him touch the sacrifice."

"Undoubtedly; for she was hidden all the time in the chuttrum."

"How did she look? Had fire also entered into her heart?"

"It was the other way. The fire had been quenched; as if her friendship had been killed. She looked at him"—he paused, in deliberation—"as I have seen Englishmen look at saddhus in the street with their rags of clothing, their long uncombed hair and their begging bowls."

There was a pause. Perhaps the father guessed that his words had hurt the sensitive nature that felt so deeply for the man who was a hero in her eyes.

"I have heard her say to the Presence that she would never speak to him again if he degraded himself—that was what she called it—by taking part in a blood sacrifice to a devil."

Then, bursting into impassioned speech, she cried—

"She holds him in contempt; she despises him for the part he played to-night. She does not know! She cannot understand!"

"If those be her true sentiments, then she can be no real friend, and the sooner they both realize it the better," said Gopaula, whose practical mind was not influenced by any false sentiment.

"Yet, except for her brother, she is the only friend he has. Poor Rajah!"

The last two words were spoken in a lower tone as she hid her face against her father's arm.

"That was my very thought this evening as he rode away on the elephant only half an hour ago; alone, except for the pujari whose duty it was to see him safe to the palace."

"Yet it is necessary that she should know him thoroughly as he is, and realize that he is not as she would

have him be—an English phantom of her imagination. Her eyes must have been opened to-night; but—it is not of her I am thinking. My pity is for the Rajah. He is alone, and he must be suffering."

"Judging by the expression on his face, it is so. He could not hide it; and his speech to the Dewan afterwards declared the truth."

"What did he say?" asked Royama, with an eagerness she did not try to veil.

"That he had looked through the gate into the garden which he might not enter. Fate had sent him to live in the desert of the maidan."

She gazed at him through tears that welled up into her large brown eyes.

"Oh, my father! He suffers even more than we think!" she cried in distress. "What can we do to help him, to save him from despair? If I were in such distress I should drown myself in the well!"

"No, daughter, you would not," replied Gopaula, sternly. "You would come to me, and I should comfort you."

"Yes. I should come to you and I should be comforted; but where is he to find comfort without a friend at hand? Oh! go to him! my father! Go to him and give him the consolation that you would give to me, your child! Go to him at once—now! before he dies of despair and grief!"

Gopaula was moved by his daughter's distress, and her appeal was quite in accordance with his impulse; but he was unable to see how it was to be done.

"I can't go to the palace and intrude myself upon his privacy with no better excuse than the desire to console and comfort. I should be unable to obtain admission."

"Let me think a moment. What excuse can we find? Ah! I know! Take a message to him from his nobles,

from our house, from the houses of Sankaram, Muniswamy Iyer and Kangra Rao—from the Dewan himself if you like. Say that they cannot wait till the morning to express their gratitude. Say that before he sleeps they wish to assure him of their thanks. It will be sufficient, if only he will allow you to have an audience. When once you gain admission you will know exactly what to say. Take money, father. There is the guard to deal with and the keepers of the inner doors."

Carried away by her impetuous words, and equally urged by his own compassion, he left the room to fulfil her request.

"Wife, I have to return to the temple for a short time," he said, in explanation, as he prepared for his unpremeditated departure. "It is not yet ten o'clock. I shall be back before eleven."

He called for a servant to bring a lantern. One of his sons offered to accompany him, but he declined the offer, saying that it was unnecessary. He should not be absent long.

The elephant bore the Rajah quickly to the palace, and he dismounted from the kneeling beast. The pujari went through the usual formalities of leave-taking, and was carried back to the temple.

Past a row of salaaming attendants and the guard the Rajah slowly made his way to the dressing-room. Even now he was mindful of what was expected from him, and put out his hand to touch the few who had ventured to come forward in the hope of obtaining a blessing. He remembered how his father's progress was impeded by the credulous who believed that contact with the beloved of the gods conferred health and good fortune. Though his hand was extended, thought did not follow the deed, and the action was mechanical.

Arrived in his dressing-room, his first desire was to reclothe himself in the garments the pujari had removed.

The white shirt, the neat, perfectly fitting trousers, the dinner coat, the socks and evening shoes were like a tonic. With them he regained self-respect as well as physical comfort.

He came back into the cheerful sitting-room with its electric light, its luxurious furniture, its quiet orderliness, and took a seat, half hoping that his surroundings might have the effect of reducing his chaotic mind into some kind of order. The two passions—in a temperament like his they amounted to passions—that tore him to pieces were anger and shame. They were the more galling since his inner consciousness told him that his anger was not just and there was no real cause for shame. If Delphine could know the true state of the case, she would honour rather than despise him.

He had not had time to face his sensations and analyse them, a process by which an Englishman puts the curb on himself and keeps his emotions in hand. The anger boiled within him unchecked, creating confusion and unreasonableness. He tried to believe that she was there without any sinister intention. He knew that curiosity and love of adventure played a strong part in her character. Reason did its best; but the forces of his eastern temperament were too strong and reason was routed. Wrath surged back upon him again and again, an active vengeful wrath that nothing in his exile had ever awakened into such activity.

Under its influence he strode about the room, incapable of sitting still or of taking the rest so much needed. The attendants waiting outside, even the guard in the verandah, heard his steps, heard a chair pushed aside impatiently, a book taken up and thrown down upon the table. They looked at each other with raised eyebrows, not daring to break the silence with speech. What could have happened to upset the Presence in this way?

He called, and four men sprang to their feet. Only one entered.

"Pull that blind up and let in a little air. The night is hot."

The man did as he was told. The night was anything but hot, for the temperature had fallen at least twenty degrees since the sun set. Five minutes later the man was summoned to let down the bamboo screen and close the long French window that opened into the verandah.

In the midst of his wrath one fact alone stood out with ever-increasing clearness. He was morally certain that as far as Delphine was concerned the end had come. Whatever hopes he may have had of the chimerical future that had dazzled his vision, they were dashed to bits beyond recovery. Friendship might be restored by-and-bye; but their intimacy could never pass the borderland again or lead them to the doors of Paradise. What she had seen had shattered her ideal and presented the real with all its barbarous crudity. The verdict was written upon her face—disgust, repulsion and condemnation. Words might explain and in a measure soften and modify that verdict; but nothing could obliterate those first cruel impressions.

The Hindu is peculiarly sensitive to ridicule and contempt. They cover him with confusion. Misjudgment, reproach, injustice, he can bear with exemplary patience and equanimity; but to experience scorn and contempt, whether merited or not, puts, as he expresses it, "a ball of fire in his belly." It is felt by all alike, rich or poor, and a cooly will sooner receive a beating from his native employer than be subjected to the stinging laugh of contempt.

The ball of fire was glowing within the Rajah with a fervent heat that was intolerable. He felt as though he could never again look Delphine in the face.

Yes; the end had come. The end of his dream, of his peace of mind, of his happiness; and the thought was unbearable. Like one of his own jungle tigers encaged, he paced up and down the room, unable to regain his mental balance.

Suddenly he stopped. When he was in England and had returned from the playing fields after victory or defeat, his companions had sometimes called for what they termed "a bottle of fizz." As a rule, he had refused to join them; but there had been occasions when he had drunk a little. Each time he did so the sparkling wine had a strange effect on his highly-strung nerves. It seemed to give him wings, to lift him out of depression and colour life differently, altering values and changing its greyness into brilliancy in some marvellous manner. The shadow of failure was dissipated, and a rosy glow shed upon events that had appeared black. He called, and as the servant entered, he said—

"Bring a bottle of champagne."

The man gazed at him in wonder for the space of a second. This was the first demand for anything of the kind. The Rajah noted his hesitation, and glared at him like an infuriated beast. The man fled to do his bidding. The days of summary capital punishment were over, but they had left an hereditary instinct that the command of princes must be obeyed at once, or dire misfortune would befall.

The wine was brought and a glass filled. It was tossed off, and the glass filled a second time. The taste of the wine recalled happy scenes of the past. He paused, and put down the brimming glass.

"Leave it there. You can go."

Gopaula arrived on foot at the palace. The guard barred his way at the portico—he had already been stopped at the mainguard gate—and the parley had begun. A

chink of silver was heard, and the visitor arrived at the next barrier, the peons who watched before the doors of the private apartments. Again the bribe was slipped into the expectant hand, and Gopaula found himself in an anteroom.

Here he was again stopped by the big Jemadar, whose special duty it was to guard with his sword and his life, if need be, the entrance to the room in which the Rajah sat.

The sight of the silver seemed to have no effect on the rigidity of that stalwart body. He stared at the late visitor in no friendly manner, and then, recognizing him, saluted, saying in excuse for his remissness, that he had not heard the tramp of horses' feet or the chant of his Excellency's bearers.

"I came on foot, Jemadar, as I was in haste to see His Highness before he retired to rest."

"It is late, Excellency. The Presence does not see at this hour."

"It is a pressing matter. Tell His Highness that Gopaula Bahadur"—he gave the Jemadar a long string of names and titles in addition to deliver—"prays that he may speak with him for a few minutes."

Still the man hesitated. His doubt was ended by the ting of the electric bell, which a servant answered. The Rajah had heard Gopaula's voice, and sent to know who had come at so late an hour. In some surprise he learned that it was Gopaula, and ordered him to be admitted at once.

It was not without a quickening of the pulse that the courtier went forward and made the salutation to his royal master. The Rajah had been interrupted in one of his restless peregrinations round the room, and was standing at the further end of it. He regarded the intruder with lowering eyes that did not tend to soothe Gopaula's nerves.

After a short pause, that was all too long for the

unbidden visitor, the Rajah said with a boisterous heartiness not altogether real in its ring—

"You are welcome, Gopaula Bahadur."

"Highness, pardon your humble servant! I have come to express my gratitude and the gratitude of your people for your great act of kindness. We cannot sleep without telling you how deeply we feel your goodness. Your father was accustomed to the ceremony. To you it must have been strange, and, perhaps, not altogether acceptable. Therefore, Highness, our gratitude to you is the greater."

He spoke slowly, uncertain how it would be received.

"It was not an easy task, I admit, Gopaula Bahadur."

"Then all the more was it gracious on the part of the Presence."

"And you have taken the trouble to come here and tell me this! You have not come to ask a favour?"

"Only the favour of your forgiveness for daring to intrude at this late hour," replied Gopaula, beginning to breathe more freely.

"There is nothing I can do for you?" demanded the Rajah, his eyes bent upon his visitor with keen inquiry.

"Nothing, Highness, except believe that we thank you from the Dewan down to the lowest beggar in the streets. We honour you more than we can express for not rejecting the old custom of your ancestors."

The Rajah was moved. The bands that had pressed intolerably upon his spirit seemed to loosen.

"It is satisfactory to find that my people appreciate my act," he said as much to himself as to his visitor.

Then yielding to one of his abrupt impulses, he approached and held out his hand.

"Shake hands, Bahadur! This is not my father's custom, and it would not commend itself perhaps to most of the men of my court; but it is known that Gopaula

Bahadur is not altogether opposed to European ways. I sadly need the hand of friendship at this moment."

The grip given by Royama's father was not a limp, apologetic touch, but the good honest grip of firm fingers. The younger man felt in it support and strength of purpose. In the pressure there was the sympathy for which his starved nature craved. Steadily Gopaula's eyes met his, and they shone with a kindliness that was unmistakable.

"Have you half an hour to spare, Bahadur?"

"I am at your Highness' service."

"Then sit down and talk to me. Were the pujaris satisfied as well as the people?"

He spoke feverishly, as if it were still an effort to control himself.

"Highness, they were more than satisfied. Your people will disperse to their houses to-night with confidence in the future."

"You think the goddess will help them?" the Rajah asked, with a smile of incredulity.

"Those who confidently look for happiness and prosperity are more likely to find it than those who allow themselves to be dominated by fear and despondency. If their pujah gives them that confidence then it has not been done in vain. Karlimaya will help those who appeal to her in faith."

They discussed the ceremony at length, comparing it with the festivals of bygone days. Gopaula, like the Dewan, had been present at many similar functions, and he was able to point out where this had differed in a few details from others.

"It seems to me, Highness, that each Prince puts something of his own personality into the rite. With your Highness there was more toleration than belief; but this is not a fact to be perceived by the masses. Their eye is only for the ritual."

"To the eye of the European it is all foolishness whatever may be the attitude of the Prince," said the Rajah bitterly.

"It is a pity that the European does not take the trouble to look below the surface in these matters. We cannot expect him to be sympathetic. His conception of the Deity differs from ours. He does not recognize evil as being part of the Divinity, and cannot see any necessity for propitiation. If they would only examine the reason that lies under our religious ceremonies instead of regarding them as shows, they would not be so shocked."

"I am inclined to think, Bahadur, that they had better not examine too closely into what they do not understand. Let them keep away," he concluded with some bitterness.

"Highness, I cannot agree with you. It is best for all that they should examine, that they should see, that they should understand thoroughly. Only by this means can they realize the depth and breadth of the gulf that separates them from us."

The Rajah was silent. The glass of wine stood upon the table untouched. Once only Gopaula shot a swift glance towards the gold-necked bottle and brimming glass with its continuous fountain of tiny bubbles. He knew what its presence there meant. The ways of the English might be worthy of imitation in some respects, but not all. Could his daughter, his quick-witted child, have divined the threatened danger, and sent him to save the Rajah from himself!

"Bahadur, I am forgetting myself; I have offered you nothing. Will you have something to drink?" said the Rajah.

"Gladly, Highness; but not wine. I have never accustomed myself to the modern fashion. Let it be sherbet, lemonade, lime-juice and soda-water; any one of these will please me, if I may be pardoned for speaking."

The Rajah touched his bell.

"Take away the wine and bring some pine-apple syrup and soda-water," he said, when the man appeared.

They talked for another half-hour, and the Rajah was surprised to find Gopaula so well informed. Certain questions outside the little State of Shivapore were discussed, and he was still more astonished at the liberal views of his companion. It was difficult to realize sometimes that the latter had never been in Europe.

It was eleven o'clock before the Rajah gave the word of dismissal without which his guest was unable to leave.

"It was kind of you to come, Bahadur. Was it your own thought?" asked the Rajah, with a directness difficult to evade.

"It was mine when it was presented to my notice, Highness."

"The Dewan, perhaps, suggested it."

"It was not the Dewan, Highness. May I take my leave? My family will think I am lost."

"They know you are here?"

"My wife believes that I am at the temple."

"But another member of your family knows you are here?"

"Possibly, Highness," he replied, avoiding the keen glance that sought for a solution.

Gopaula Bahadur made his salaam, and followed his lantern bearer to his house.

The Rajah stood for a few minutes in deep thought, the shadow of a smile upon his lips.

"So, then, it was Royama who sent him—Royama, who has saved me a second time from making a fool of myself! Oh, Karlimaya! mythical goddess of my people! Have you opened my eyes instead of cursing me by bringing the English girl there?" Then he threw back his head and laughed, the anger melting away and the horrible

sense of shame vanishing. "Or was it the champagne that cleared my vision? What was it Ted used to say? 'One glass to clear your brain; Two to set you going again; Three to keep you in your chair; Four to make a fool of you there!' I'm tired, but, thanks to Gopaula, I shall sleep!"

In less than half an hour the Rajah had forgotten his troubles in the healthy, dreamless slumber of youth.

CHAPTER XXX.

The following morning the Ranees assembled in Sitrama's room to hear again the story of the previous evening. Two or three versions were given over-night before they retired to bed; but the greediness for news, always to be found in the zenana and harem, sustained their interest; and they looked forward to a repetition of the tale from each separate spy. Little was said while they waited for their emissaries; and they beguiled the time each in their own way.

The third Ranee nursed a kitten that curled itself confidingly inside the folds of the plain white cotton saree which was the badge of widowhood. The fourth played with a cheap watch, winding the knob of the handle backwards since it was wound up by the forward movement as far as it would go.

Sitrama sat a little apart from her sisters, unoccupied except by the working of her brain, scheming, planning, ever working to twist the current of events to her liking, her glittering eyes shining with unusual excitement. The second Ranee divided her attention between the contemplation of a prism and the duty of being a ready listener should her senior be moved to speech. The rays of coloured light filled the imprisoned woman with strange delight. A thin beam from the morning sun penetrated through the venetians of the window. Into this ray she passed the glass bauble; and the brilliant colours stimulated the starved sensuousness into a vague helpless craving that

stirred imagination and afforded a ghostly pleasure. The prism had once been an ornamental drop on a glass chandelier and it had been bought for a trifle by the market woman in the bazaar.

Presently Amabai entered with the usual ceremonious greeting. The Ranees eyes were fixed on her in eager anticipation.

"Speak! tell the news! We would hear everything."

"The Presence was there, the image of his late father. Ah! dear Queen of the zenana! The tears would have blinded your eyes if you could have looked upon him. He might have been the Maharajah, your husband!"

A chorus of "Aiyohs!" greeted this announcement. The woman with the crafty instinct of the oriental courtier continued—

"His voice, his manner, his bearing were those of his father and of no one else. It made the people weep to see him."

She put the corner of her cloth to her eyes as though to wipe away her own tears.

"Tell us how he looked. Did he wear any of those cursed English clothes?"

"Indeed, no, Highness! The pujaris saw to that. He was in the same pujari dress that was worn by his father. Surely the State will be blessed with peace and plenty in the coming year."

"What of the Englishwoman who dared to intrude?" asked the third Ranee, whose hand gently coaxed the purring kitten.

"She was powerless—as powerless as a spider's web before the foot of my lord, the elephant. She called to the Presence, bringing bad luck upon him by naming him; but Karlimaya held him safe in her keeping."

"What did the Presence do?" asked the second Ranee,

turning the prism so that its many points of rainbow light fell upon the face of the speaker.

"He ordered the Dewan to remove her, to shut her up in the carriage and have her taken away," said the woman, with malignant triumph.

"In the old days she would have been lowered into a deep dark room full of snakes for daring to speak thus to His Highness," remarked the third Ranee, as she tenderly cuddled the furry ball of a kitten. She was always the most bloodthirsty of them all in her suggestions, yet she wept over the imaginary pains and troubles of her pets, animate and inanimate. "It is to be regretted that the hole is filled up."

"The English do not permit its use; hence the world is fuller than ever of bad people," said the second Ranee.

"It may be opened again one day," remarked the fourth Ranee. "The English cannot be here always. The beat of the picks upon the hard earth would be a pleasant sound."

"The snakes are gone," said the second Ranee, regretfully.

"They can be replaced," responded the third.

"Or there can be a plague of scorpions again."

"Shooh!" silenced the elder Ranee. At the allusion to Delphine she had become immersed in thought and did not notice the course conversation was taking. Amabai, observing her mistress' abstraction, had not continued her story. Sitrama looked at her.

"Let me hear how the Presence finished the ceremony?"

"After the Dewan had led away the foreign woman, the wreath ceremony was performed."

"Did the Presence also place his wreath upon Karlimaya's shoulders?"

"With words of adoration he laid it in position, the

last and best and most beautiful of all as was fitting. The Englishwoman——"

"Silence! Her name is not to be mentioned in the zenana. Any one uttering it shall be punished."

As she fired this bomb-shell among her women her eyes swept round menacingly. Some of them moved uneasily. Anger once roused in the zenana may be far reaching before it is allayed, and reason does not walk hand in hand with it.

"It shall be as your Highness wishes," replied Amabai, humbly.

After a few more questions and answers the other agents were sent for and each in her turn gave her story with what embroidery she fancied. Praise of the Rajah was interlarded with descriptions of the rites. The part played by Delphine was omitted altogether. The Ranees seemed never tired of hearing the tale; sometimes a spy was recalled to go over the old ground again. The senior Ranee said but little, the questions being put chiefly by the other Ranees. The interviews were terminated by the approach of the Rajah, who came to pay his usual morning visit somewhat against his inclinations. It was nothing new. The daily duty was often irksome and irritating. Under no condition was it a pleasure. This morning it was a greater effort than it had ever been before to face those four inquisitive women.

He entered moody and abstracted. Sleep had refreshed him and dissipated some of the depression. The chaotic sense of shame that had upset his mental balance was dispelled, thanks to the action of Gopaula; but his anger against Delphine still smouldered. He could not forgive her for having caught him unawares in such a guise and position.

The story of her presence at the festival of Karlimaya could not have failed to have reached the Ranees' ears; but

he had no intention of discussing it with them or even of allowing them to comment on her action. They plied him with all sorts of questions which he answered with patience. To his surprise her name was not mentioned; nor was the unfortunate incident hinted at. It was a relief to escape the severe cross-questioning he feared; and he congratulated himself on not having to listen to abuse levelled at her head with a plainness exceeding the European standard of good manners. Once or twice he caught the eye of Sitrama. A hard expression on her handsome old features made him rejoice in the thought that Delphine was out of reach. A policy that had begun with scorpions was not likely to end there after what had happened the night before.

The Rajah proved a restless guest that morning. He spent most of the time walking aimlessly up and down the room. In the midst of his pacings he heard the chant of bearers in the courtyard below. The Ranee who was nursing the kitten looked up with the light of pleasure in her mild eyes and said—

"It is Gopaula's daughter. She is bringing the wonderful dog belonging to the writing sahib for us to see. She says that it can do tricks as well as a human being."

"Gopaula's daughter comes here frequently," he said, stopping near Sitrama, who talked less than was her custom.

"She is always welcome; she is clever and amusing," remarked the second Ranee.

"If her father had been wise and had kept her at home——" The senior Ranee spoke slowly, looking keenly into her stepson's face. What she read there caused her to be silent, and she did not complete the sentence. She turned her head aside with an impatient movement, and continued: "She has learned many strange ways which her parents take no pains to correct. When a husband has been found for her there will be trouble in his zenana.

Go, my son; it is not fitting that she should find you with us; although doubtless with her foreign manners she will not be troubled."

His reply was to seat himself in the chair provided for him. Sitrama shot an angry glance at him. Recognizing her inability to turn him out by force, she submitted to the inevitable with a shrug of the shoulders. Events were getting a little beyond her control. The fact did not alarm her. She ascribed it to her own laxity in not enforcing her will. It had not dawned upon her yet that her power with the Rajah was not so great as she imagined.

"Aiyoh! I suppose we must submit to new ways in the zenana now that the town is full of foreigners."

"There is nothing else to be done," answered the Rajah; and again they exchanged glances in which they measured their strength.

Amabai entered with the announcement that the honourable daughter of his excellency, Gopaula Bahadur, had arrived and begged to be allowed to pay her respects to their Highnesses. She addressed Sitrama. As she spoke she watched the Rajah out of the corner of her eye expectantly. By every rule of the zenana he should hurry away to his own rooms. She could scarcely believe her ears when he said—

"Ask her to enter."

The three Ranees looked at Sitrama. What would she do? Indeed, if it came to that, what could she do if he chose to remain? They half expected an outburst but it did not occur. The senior Ranee sat silent, nursing her anger against the foreigners who had taught such queer behaviour to her stepson. The reckoning might come afterwards when the innocent would have to suffer for the contumacy of the guilty. The Rajah heard the little inarticulate protest on the part of the company present, but took no notice of it. After some delay Royama entered.

That she was surprised to see him there, no one could fail to observe. In addition she was unmistakably pleased to meet him. Her astonishment was quickly mastered, but she could not hide the pleasure. Unknown to her it shone in her eyes and peeped out in the happy smile upon her full lips.

She advanced into the room without any awkwardness or embarrassment; and after greeting the Ranees, she made the proper salaam to her Prince. He rose and extended a hand which she took, and the Ranees watched the English greeting with mixed feelings. It was chiefly curiosity, but with Sitrama it was something more. These modern innovations were not at all to her taste. Peter, Delphine's dog, trotted in by Royama's side. His greeting to his old master, the Rajah, bordered on the boisterous.

"Peter was very troublesome," explained Royama. "I could not persuade him to follow me. The passage from the purdah room is long and has several turnings. At one point the little dog sat up and begged for sugar. He positively refused to move until I had given him a lump. Here, Peter! Die for the Rajah! Die, sir, die!"

She was obliged to give her commands in English, but she explained his tricks to the company in her own language.

Meanwhile the Ranees continued to watch her closely. They had looked for a show of modest confusion when her eyes first fell on the Rajah; but there was none. She was as natural and as much at her ease with him as she was with them. They could not know that the two had met frequently in England and were on excellent terms.

Peter's tricks served to distract their attention. He went through them again and again, and received such a reward of sugar as his mistress, with an eye to his health, had never bestowed.

The Rajah said little. He seemed content to sit still

and watch. His eyes dwelt frequently upon Royama. The pleasure she gave to the four widows was not lost upon him either. He rose abruptly with a brief word of farewell to the Ranees. Looking down at Royama—who was holding an enticing lump of sugar just above Peter's nose with a command that he was to ask for it—he said in English.

"It was kind of you to send your father to me last evening. I was glad to see him."

She was slightly disconcerted at this definite attribution of her father's action to herself. The shadow of a smile passed over his lips as he noted her embarrassment.

"He told no tales; it is my surmise," he said reassuringly. "Send him again before long. It does me good to talk to him."

"Mr. Dersingham and his sister will be back soon, and then your Highness will be at no loss for a friend."

"Send him all the same. I want a friend of my own nationality," he said shortly.

Then as he still stood looking down at her as though he expected her to speak, she said awkwardly and without any previous intention of touching on the subject—

"My father told me that Miss Dersingham was at the feast last night. She must have been much interested as she has seen nothing of the sort before. I am glad she went. Since she is such a friend to us all, it is best that she should fully understand our ways. She will reach Calcutta this evening."

"I hope she caught her train."

"I called at the bungalow on my way here to fetch Peter's rug, which I forgot to take to my house yesterday. She was not there, Highness; so she must have been in time." She noticed that Sitrama's eye was fixed upon her as the conversation flowed in a language unknown to the senior Ranee. "The Presence must not talk to his slave

in English. The Ranees will be jealous," she added, with a twinkle of amusement.

"And not without reason, perhaps," he replied under his breath. "I will go," he said aloud. "They will be more at their ease without me."

He left her still kneeling by the little dog. At the curtain before the doorway, he turned and looked at her. The moment he disappeared the Ranees crowded round.

"Tell! tell! what did he say?" they all cried at once, like impetuous children.

As she did not reply immediately, for the excellent reason that she could not recall exactly what had passed, Amabai, eager to avoid the mention of Delphine's name, took upon herself to explain.

"The Presence asked the honourable lady to tell his Excellency, her father, that he wished to see him again. He was at the palace last night after the feast, and he is to pay His Highness another visit."

"Aha!" was the comment of the senior Ranee; and she went back to her cushions, where she fell into a deep train of thought, her eyes resting on Royama.

For an hour Royama amused the immured women, and the time flew all too fast for them. Peter won golden opinions in all but one respect. His conduct towards the kitten was unmannerly and hostile. The little ball of fur was capable of taking care of itself, however. It fluffed out its frills, and spat and swore itself into safety under the wing of its patroness, to the intense amusement of the company.

On her way back to the palanquin Peter again delayed her progress by sitting up and begging for sugar. She caught him up in her arms.

"No, Peter; your mistress would say that you were a greedy little pig if she could see you," she said, as she stepped into the palanquin.

The dog replied with a whimper and a desperate struggle to free himself; he succeeded in his design before the bearers could enter the room and carry her away. There was a chase and Peter was captured in the passage where he sat up and begged abjectly, adding a whine of entreaty to his petition. She snatched him up, scolding him as she ran back to the purdah room.

"You naughty little dog! What will Delphine say when I tell her how badly you have behaved? She will ask her brother to beat you!"

She kissed his white head by way of showing how much her threat was worth. As the bearers passed through the gateway and turned towards Gopaula's house, a native placed himself in their path and caused them to stop. He fell to the ground and prostrated himself before the closed curtains that hid the occupant. The head bearer tried to drive him away, but he refused to move. The servant then ordered the bearers to step aside and proceed. Royama peeping through her curtains, saw the figure lying in the road.

"What does he want?" she asked.

"He is a beggar, honourable lady."

"I am not a beggar, greatness!" replied Karapan, with indignation. "I have something to tell."

"Shooh!" said the servant with contempt. "Her excellency has no favours to grant to a low caste fellow like you! Proceed, bearers, and carry our honourable mistress to his excellency's house."

The men resumed the interrupted chant and continued their journey. Karapan scrambled to his feet and followed the palanquin, not daring to approach too closely for fear of the long staff which was carried by the servant. As he ran behind he repeated his prayers which Royama could only partially hear. She caught the words "Most excellent lady," "Miss sahib," "Honourable lady," "palace," and

she concluded that it was some one who desired to enlist her help in an appeal to the Ranees. Gradually the sound of his voice died away in the distance. She was convinced that he was no ordinary beggar soliciting alms, as her servant would have her believe. If the man should waylay her again she would attend to what he had to say. In her residence in England she had learned to be just to all alike. Requests could be heard whether they were granted or not. It was impossible for her to interview the man in the public road, but he might be told to come to the house where her father would listen to his tale whatever it might be. That it had something to do with the palace she was sure, and as he had addressed himself to her it probably related to the zenana.

The Rajah returned to his room. He seated himself at the writing-table with the intention of sending a few lines to Ted concerning some matter that he had forgotten. A servant entered carrying a telegram on a silver waiter. Usually these and all other written communications were brought to the secretary. In Ted's absence the Rajah had ordered them to be taken to him direct. He opened the brown envelope, expecting to read an inquiry for instructions regarding one of the many commissions given to Ted. The contents astonished him.

"D. missed her train last night. Is she coming by day mail? Cannot get answer."

The Rajah rang his bell. "The car—at once."

Ten minutes later he was striding up the steps of the bungalow.

The house was very quiet. Doors and windows stood open; the place had been swept and dusted. In the garden the men moved about among the flowers weeding and tying up and watering as usual. The cool night had been succeeded by a day of brilliant sunshine in which birds and butterflies were rejoicing and by this time—half an hour before noon—the heat was tropical.

The Rajah walked into the drawing-room. The air was full of the scent of yellow tea roses that vividly recalled the mistress. Books were lying on the tables, and Delphine's work-basket in which she had found the scorpion stood upon a little teapoy near her favourite chair. There was no sign of her presence. He listened, but could hear nothing but the fall of water from the gardeners' pots, and the plaintive whistle of the garden robin in the poinsettia bush. On the writing-table lay three brown envelopes unopened. He rang an electric bell and a servant appeared. On recognizing the Rajah the man prostrated himself.

"Where is your mistress? speak!"

"She has gone to Calcutta, great Highness. She left last night with the ayah an hour before the train was due to start."

"Who are you?"

"Your slave is the table servant of the bungalow."

The Rajah turned away and took up the three envelopes. Telegrams were not like letters; they could not be private. The fact of their being there unopened was sufficient evidence that the man spoke the truth. Delphine could not be in the bungalow. He opened them one after the other. In the first despatched, Ted informed his sister that he had arrived safely at the Rajah's house in Calcutta and had found her wire awaiting him. He was sorry that she had missed her train. He supposed that she would travel by the day mail which would arrive the following morning. The second telegram asked when she was coming. The third, why she did not reply to his question. The first message had arrived at seven in the morning, the last at ten o'clock. The Rajah had received his an hour later.

He was puzzled. Delphine had undoubtedly left Shivapet last night and would arrive in the ordinary course of events that evening. There must be some mistake in the delivery of the telegram received by Ted; the wording

was wrong. He returned to the palace and sent a message to Ted.

"Miss Dersingham left Shivapet last night. I saw her myself on her way to the station. Must be some mistake. Meet the evening train as arranged. Please wire her arrival."

Never had day seemed so long as this. It came to an end at last. Delphine was due in Calcutta at seven. A little before eight another telegram reached the Rajah.

"Met train. D. not there. Make inquiries."

Again the car was called for and the Rajah, leaving his dinner untouched, drove to the Residency.

CHAPTER XXXI.

Many inquiries were made that night but nothing of importance was discovered. The station-master, a native, could not say if Miss Dersingham left by the train, although two porters assured the Resident that they had assisted to put the English lady into a reserved first-class compartment, and had placed her luggage in the van of the Calcutta night mail. The coachman and syces supported the story of the porters as far as they could, but they did not see her enter the train. The carriage had been driven to the station as fast as the horses could go. It had arrived two minutes before the train started, and Miss Dersingham had only just time to get in. As it was, in her haste, she had left her umbrella behind, which one of the syces had given into the custody of the servant in charge of the bungalow.

The Rajah was troubled, much more troubled than the Resident, who had a high opinion of Delphine's capacity for taking care of herself.

"We shall hear that she has stopped somewhere on the road. She has her ayah with her, and I don't think we need be at all anxious," he said, in answer to an expression of concern on the part of the Rajah.

The anger he had felt at Delphine's appearance at the temple had by this time evaporated. In its place was a formless anxiety that he could not or would not shape definitely into suspicion. He allowed himself to be comforted and reassured by Harlesden; at the same time his uneasiness was

in no way allayed. He sent for the Dewan after seeing the Resident and closely questioned him; but could gather nothing fresh. The Dewan had seen Miss Dersingham enter the carriage at the temple, and had watched it as it was driven off into the darkness, in the direction, as far as he could tell, of the station.

At half-past ten o'clock the same evening Gopaula received a summons from the Rajah to go at once to the palace. After the message carried by Royama in the morning her father was not unprepared for the call, although by that time he had almost given up the expectation of being wanted that night. The car was sent for him, and he did not keep it waiting. The Rajah was pacing restlessly up and down his room when he arrived.

"Ah! Gopaula Bahadur! You are welcome. I am in some anxiety about Miss Dersingham. Perhaps you have heard."

"No news of the English lady has reached me, Highness. My daughter told me that she left for Calcutta last night."

"So we all believed and still believe; but her brother has sent a telegram to say that she has not arrived by that train, and he asks us to make inquiries."

He related all the details as far as he knew them from the time that she left the temple under the Dewan's charge to find her carriage. Gopaula listened, putting a question here and there.

"It seems incredible in these days, Highness, that an Englishwoman can disappear so completely. It must be as His Excellency, The Resident, says. She has broken her journey somewhere on the road. Your Highness has placed the matter in the hands of Mr. Wythall?"

"Of course; but he is as much at a loss in the matter as we are."

"She has her servant with her?"

"A fact that Mr. Harlesden finds consoling. The woman

is trustworthy and accustomed to travel. The disturbing part of the story is that Miss Dersingham wired to her brother herself to say that she had missed her train. Apparently she did not miss it here, as we have the word of five men that she was in time for the mail and left Shivapet by it."

"What do the telegraph office officials say?"

"We have not been able to find out at present. The clerks have gone to their houses and I doubt if we shall hear anything from them till to-morrow morning."

"From what place was the message sent out?"

"Mr. Dersingham does not say. It is too late to communicate further with him to-night. We must wait till the morning."

The Rajah looked at his visitor. Something was in his mind, and Gopaula felt that he had not yet arrived at the reason for his call at so late an hour.

"Can I do anything to help your Highness?" he asked.

"I want you to place all the facts before your daughter and to let me have her opinion. She may be able to help us with some suggestion. She has been so much with Miss Dersingham that perhaps she can give us a clue to follow. Bring me word as early as you can. I shall give an order for your admittance at sunrise."

Gopaula returned to his house and inquired for his daughter. She had gone to her room.

"I must see her," he said to his wife.

"Surely you can wait till the morning. It is past eleven."

When once she had sent her household to bed it was against all the laws of order and propriety that any one of them should be disturbed. Gopaula was not the man to be ruled by the tradition of the zenana.

"Go, wife, and do as I ask. I must speak with the child."

His tone intimated that there was a necessity for his demand; and without further protest she knocked at the door of the bedroom. Royama was not in bed. By the light of her reading lamp she was deep in the thrills of an English novel. The pale blue quilted dressing-gown and satin slippers that she wore did not altogether meet with her mother's approval. They savoured too much of luxurious English ways.

"Your father wishes to see you," she said shortly.

"Ask him to come here. The lights are out in the other rooms. We shall be more private here."

Her parents entered together and the mother, who was never happy in the western chair, sat upon the floor at her daughter's knee. Gopaula took one of the comfortable seats that his forethought had provided for his child. Again the tale of Delphine's disappearance was told. It startled Royama more than a little.

"The Resident thinks that she has broken her journey on the road, perhaps at the big junction, and will go on by the next train."

"What does the Presence think?"

"He gives no opinion; but I can see that he is not satisfied."

"Is he still angry with her for appearing at the festival?"

"It is forgotten in this new trouble."

"Then he is making a trouble of it," said Royama. "That means a suspicion of some kind. Whom does he distrust? The Dewan?"

"He said not a word of anything of the kind to me. He particularly asked for your opinion, daughter. I am to go to-morrow morning early. You must have your message ready at sunrise. Is there anything more that you wish to know?"

"You have told me everything. She had her luggage with her. Which carriage took her to the station?"

"The same that brought you here when you arrived from England."

"The two porters saw her into the train and the three men with the carriage say that they took her to the station. Did no one else notice her arrival?"

"Who else was there likely to take notice? At a railway station all is bustle and confusion, and each traveller thinks only of himself."

"Did any one see the carriage at the station?"

"Yes; the police peon on duty and the night-watchman. The stationmaster's son also caught sight of it as it drove away, but he saw nothing of Miss Dersingham."

"It is very puzzling," said Royama, in perplexity.

"Think it well over, daughter. And now put away your book and sleep, as it is late. I shall wake you early."

Royama was left to herself. She turned down the lamp. Her father had bidden her sleep; but sleep had forsaken her eyes altogether. If she laid herself down on her bed she knew that she would only toss restlessly. It was easier and more comfortable to think as she sat in her favourite armchair. She could not puzzle out this mystery all in a moment. She must have time.

Nothing was done in this world without a motive; of that Royama was assured. Then the first thing to accomplish was the discovery of Delphine's motive. Had her disappearance anything to do with the shock she must have sustained at the temple? It was scarcely likely. What the festival revealed would have a different effect altogether. It might drive her away from Shivapet, but it would not cause her to hide. Then there was the telegram from Delphine herself to her brother. It might very well have been sent from some town on the line. If she had broken her journey, it must have been done on the spur of the moment, for in talking to Royama she had not mentioned any such intention. On the contrary, she

had spoken of the length of time she would be in the train, as if she had no other thought than of going direct. Moreover, she had furnished herself with reading matter and food to last well through the twenty-four hours she would be travelling. Had anything occurred to keep her in Shivapet? If that had been the case, she would have been found in her own bungalow, or heard of as staying with Mrs. Constable.

The house was very quiet. For some time she caught the sound of her parents' voices as they discussed the mystery in their own room. Gradually the sound ceased, and the silence was unbroken except for the occasional cry of a night bird passing over the roof on its way to its feeding ground. Now and then a dog barked, and once a stray animal ran down the road with a challenging yelp that caused Peter to stir in his basket and open one eye. Seeing his mistress still up, he lifted his head and cocked his ears. If she were thus watching for musk-rats and bandicoots—it could not be anything else from his canine point of view—it was undoubtedly his duty to watch with her. Urged by this line of instinctive reasoning, he stretched himself and yawned, and stepped out of his basket to come to her.

"Oh, Peter! Go to bed. It isn't time to get up. Go to bed, sir!' she said softly, as she tucked him in his rug again.

The dog sat up on his hind legs and looked at her with his intelligent brown eyes.

"No, Peter. No sugar at this time of night. You have become strangely demoralized in the short time your mistress has been away, begging for sugar as you did in the palace without having earned it. And now, again, you are begging when you ought to be asleep."

She settled him in his basket and drew the rug over his smooth satin body. In obedience to her command he

curled himself up, but not to sleep. With a watchful eye and one ear cocked, he lay still, alert and ready for action at the very first appearance of Mr. Bandicoot.

Royama turned to her bed. What message should she send by her father? Until something suggested itself to her brain it was impossible to sleep. She seated herself in a long cane lounge and drew a woollen shawl over her knees, for the night was cool.

Once more she went over the ground, marshalling all the facts in order, and carefully considering every detail. It was certain that Delphine had received a shock at the sight of the Rajah before Karlimaya's image, such a shock as could not fail to bring disillusion; nay, more, it would hurt, and she would suffer. Royama's natural disposition was gentle and tender to all pain, mental as well as physical. Somehow, in this case she could feel no pity for her friend. It was best that her eyes should be opened, that she should see things as they really were, and not delude herself into believing them to be otherwise. She was glad, very glad that Delphine went to the temple. It might have the effect of destroying an influence that was not good for the Rajah. It might even send her back to England.

Royama pulled herself up sharply. Her thoughts were running away with her. She loved Delphine with a soft, warm affection, that sought to find expression in some little act of kindness constantly. Of late something had entered that love to poison it, and when the poison made its sting felt, she could have parted with her dear foreign friend without a tear.

Love and hate lie very near together in the oriental nature, and jealousy is the magic spell that turns the one into the other.

So subtle was her jealousy that she did not recognize it, and she ascribed her disaffection to her anxiety for the Rajah's welfare.

"I shall be sorry to lose her as a friend if she goes back to England; but—yes, I must tell the truth to myself—I shall be glad! Oh, I know I shall be glad because—because her presence here alienates him from his people, who love him!"

Again her mind wandered from the point. Rosy dreams inseparable from youth swept over her, and Delphine was forgotten. It was Peter who recalled Royama's thoughts. He concluded that she was still on the watch for a rat, and was aggrieved at being left out of it. He crept round to her feet, oblivious of the lecture he had received and begged to be allowed to join in whatever was going.

"Oh, Peter! Where is your mistress? Can't you tell us something about her? You would be very sorry if she left Shivapet. Should I be sorry? Not altogether, little dog. In my naughtiest humour I should be glad. And the Ranees! How pleased they would be! How they would rejoice! I believe the senior Ranee positively hates Delphine, because she thinks it was her influence that made the Rajah refuse to marry. He was right in refusing that child, all the same. The senior Ranee——"

She stared at the dog and bounded from her chair, leaping to her feet with an exclamation. As she stood in front of Peter, staring at him, he sat up, his paws hanging and his nose lifted and eyes blinking in a pathetic appeal. A dazzling flood of light, nothing less than an inspiration, swept over her. All the incidents of the last twenty-four hours presented themselves in clear and distinct order—the festival, Delphine's unexpected appearance at it, the Rajah's confusion at the sight of her, Gopaula's visit to the palace late that night, her own visit to the palace the following morning and Peter's performance, the meeting with the Rajah in the zenana, the incident on the way back to her house when a strange appeal was made with the

mention of the name by which Delphine was known to the servants, Ted's inquiry for his sister and a day of suspense for the Rajah which was not relieved by other telegrams announcing her non-arrival, the Rajah's summons to her father, and the request that he should consult his daughter.

As Royama stared wide-eyed at the dog, her fingers slowly closed into a tightened grip.

"Oh! Oh!—it can't be! Impossible! She would not dare!"

Yet, for all the assurance to the contrary on her tongue, her suspicion remained as strong as ever.

"If you could speak, Peter, what would you say?"

The tension of muscles caused by her discovery gradually relaxed, and she sank back into her chair exhausted, her hands resting upon her lap, her body still. Vitality was concentrated in her eyes, which glittered with a hardness that was not natural.

"She is safe—of that I am certain—and she will be properly cared for, though not in the way she would like. A few days will do her no harm, and it will make the return to England assured."

Thus musing, she sat till the small hours of the morning, while her parents slept all unconscious of their daughter's vigil. Peter, finding her so quiet, concluded that she had abandoned her watch for rats and had gone to sleep. He curled himself up again in his basket, after circling two or three times; and was soon in the land of dreams seeking his mistress in dark, visionary passages full of doors that were always shut and locked.

The sun was not above the horizon when Gopaula's voice roused his daughter with the question—

"What am I to say to the Rajah?"

A slight pause followed. It was as well that he could not see her face, with its hard, determined expression.

"Tell the Presence that his slave is sorry. Light has not come."

"Can you think of nothing to solve the difficulty?" asked Gopaula, on the other side of the door.

The ring of disappointment in his tone did not escape her ear; but the lines about her mouth remained. She clenched her hands and replied clearly and distinctly and without hesitation—

"Nothing, nothing! I can think of nothing more than has already been suggested by the Resident."

If Gopaula had not known his daughter to be gentle, in speech and manner, he might have suspected that her answer was given with impatience. It was impossible, however, to suppose that she could ever be impatient.

CHAPTER XXXII.

The Rajah passed a restless night, and awoke at dawn with a weight upon his mind that he could not shake off, and a sense of being baffled. Suspicions, like evil shadows, haunted him through the dark hours. He put them aside, but they returned again and again. His first inquiry was for letter or telegram, but none had come.

The ceremonial of his daily act of worship was performed, and he dressed and went into his sitting-room telling the peons at the door that if any Europeans called they were to be admitted at once, as also was Gopaula Bahadur. In another hour he would be able to hear from Ted whether his sister had arrived by the morning train.

The first to come was Wythall, Commissioner of Police. He brought the information that the clerk had been found who despatched the message from Miss Dersingham to her brother. According to this man's story the telegram was handed in by a woman answering to the description of the ayah, who was not known personally to the clerk. The message was written in the vernacular, but, at the woman's request, it was repeated in English and delivered in English at the other end. This was to avoid mistake, she explained. The clerk had the curiosity to ask who she was, and she replied at once that she was Miss Dersingham's ayah. She volunteered the information that her mistress had stayed too long at the temple, and,

in consequence, had missed her train by two minutes. The missie sahib had not returned to the bungalow, but was waiting at the station for the next train. The carriage that brought her up had returned to the palace, the coachman being under the impression that the train had been caught.

"The fact that the message was handed in here is confirmed by Dersingham himself, with whom I have been in communication. There is no doubt that it was sent from Shivapet," concluded Wythall.

"Have you formed any opinion as to the probable solution of the mystery?" asked the Rajah.

"We are inclined to believe that she has stopped somewhere on the line. I am going to inquire presently of the station-masters at all the places likely to have tempted her to leave the train. As Mrs. Constable says, she has an indomitable courage and a wonderful spirit of adventure, more than sufficient to account for any deviation from fixed plans."

A servant appeared at the door with a telegram.

"This will tell us whether she has arrived by the early train due at Calcutta a little before six," remarked the Rajah, as he opened the envelope.

The message was short. It announced her non-arrival.

"It is most extraordinary," said the Rajah.

"Dersingham does not appear to be uneasy. He seems to have the same confidence in her ability to take care of herself as the Resident and Mrs. Constable have. Has your Highness arrived at any conclusion?"

The Rajah did not reply immediately.

"I can suggest nothing more than has already been done," he said at last, without answering the question directly.

"I propose to continue the search as far as possible," said Wythall. "I am not at all satisfied. Being a

policeman perhaps makes me scent foul play where others would suspect nothing."

"Where are you going to search?" asked the Rajah, looking at him with a quick, keen glance.

"Along the line, as I have said. She may have been robbed for all we know. I am also inquiring for her luggage, which, with the exception of the umbrella, has disappeared in the same marvellous manner without leaving a trace."

"What is your opinion, Mr. Wythall?"

"I agree with Mr. Harlesden and Mrs. Constable that her spirit of adventure has induced her to break her journey to see some temple or mosque; or because she was tired of travelling in the heat of the day. But I go further than they do. I cannot help fearing that she has fallen into the hands of thieves. Her ignorance of the country and its dangers might lead her into difficulties that she would not dream of."

Wythall departed and Gopaula was announced. He was disappointed with the message given him by his daughter, and had delayed his visit. After a short interview, the Rajah dismissed him, and Gopaula returned to his house with the unpleasant conviction that he had failed to render the help that was hoped for. The Rajah had said—

"Tell me any remark that your daughter may have made, however trivial it was."

To which he was obliged to reply that she admitted her inability to arrive at any solution to the mystery.

"Did she make no comment?"

"None; unless it was to express her faith in Miss Dersingham's love of adventure, and to repeat what others have said—that the Englishwoman knows how to take care of herself and that doubtless she is safe."

When Gopaula reached his house, Royama was assisting

her mother in the kitchen. Two or three times he sought an opportunity of speaking with her, but was not successful. She was unusually active this morning, but to her mother's annoyance her activity showed itself by fits and starts. Occasionally she paused in her self-imposed tasks, and relapsed into deep thought. Two or three times she paid a visit to Peter, shut in her room so that his shadow might not fall in the kitchen and pollute the food or the cooking vessels. Each time she went she spoke to him but did not touch him.

"Are you very lonely, little dog? Do you want your mistress? You don't like being shut up by yourself do you? Poor Peter! Good dog!"

Words without deeds brought him poor comfort. He recognized the sympathy in her voice, and gave vent to a whine that ended in something like a dismal howl.

"Don't cry! don't cry, Peter!" she said.

Again he whined, and sat up in his very best manner, begging to be released—a sad little animal, extremely sorry for himself.

It was impossible not to pity him. It really must be rather dreadful to be imprisoned and separated from all those he loved.

"It can't be helped. It is the only way to keep people out of mischief, to shut them up."

With that she closed the door on him, and the disappointed dog gave expression to his injured feelings by whimpering dismally.

"Daughter!" exclaimed the mother. "What are you doing? You have put the chopped onion prepared for the chutney into the pan containing the preserved roselle. Where are your thoughts, child?"

In confusion Royama forsook the kitchen, leaving the cooking to hands that had an undivided attention to guide them. As she passed through the verandah of the inner

courtyard to go to her room, she encountered her father. Instead of avoiding him, she stopped.

"You saw the Presence this morning, father?"

"Yes, daughter. He is sad, very sad. I wished that I could speak words of hope and comfort, but I had none on my tongue."

"Why does he trouble over her absence?" she asked with some bitterness. "She is nothing to him."

Gopaula looked at her in surprise. It was unlike her usual speech.

"She is his guest—here by his invitation. It is to his honour that she should come to no harm. How can he ever look her brother in the face again if harm or even insult come to her? And her brother is not only his secretary, but his friend."

Suddenly she laid her hand on his arm, and, to his astonishment, there were tears in her eyes as she spoke.

"Father, I want to go to the palace."

"The palace, child? Have the Ranees sent for you?"

"They have told me to come when I like. I shall always be admitted. To-day I have a reason for going. I wish you to be with me."

"They will not see me," he replied, in still greater amazement.

She looked at him for a few seconds with shining eyes, then, leaning towards him, she whispered something in his ear. The good man stared at her blankly, and said, with a new gravity—

"No time must be lost, daughter. I will order the carriage at once. Why have you delayed so long?"

Her head was lowered and the words came falteringly.

"Forgive your child. She has been wicked, and full of evil thoughts towards her friend."

The tears were falling freely.

"How is that, daughter?" asked Gopaula, sternly.

"I have been jealous of Delphine."

"My lotus bud! There was no need!" he cried, in distress.

The morning passed as heavily for the Rajah as the night. At his request the Dewan came, and was subjected to another cross-examination as to what had occurred on the evening of the festival. As he described the events, the Rajah's eye rested on the fine aristocratic old face with keen inquiry. The questioning gaze was disconcerting, but nothing fresh was elicited, and the Dewan was relieved when the interview ended.

The midday meal was taken and the accompanying religious offices performed. The Rajah had left the dining-room and retired to his sitting-room when he remembered for the first time that he had omitted his daily visit to the Ranees. He wondered that they had not sent a reminder, as was their custom when he was later than usual. The hour was past, however, and if he went at all he must wait until they had had their noonday rest.

The palace was very quiet. Its Prince should be taking his siesta also; but, though he had had a wakeful night, his brain was too active to allow of any sleep.

There was a stir outside in the anteroom, where the servants sat ready to answer his call. He rang his bell, and a man entered with a note. He took it listlessly, then stared at it in blank astonishment, scarcely believing his own eyes.

The handwriting was Delphine's!

Tearing it open he read it through three separate times. In it she asked if he would do her the honour of coming to the bungalow at his convenience. She wished to see him before starting for Calcutta that evening.

Again his bell was rung, sharply, with a quick repetition, as it was not answered immediately.

"The car—now—at once!"

It took a few minutes to call the chauffeur and get out the electric brougham that was always kept in readiness for his use. In less than fifteen minutes after receiving the note he was at the bungalow. He mounted the steps of the verandah and hurried to the drawing-room.

In the centre of the room stood Delphine, pale, her mouth set in unusual lines, and with no sign of the smile that was his invariable greeting formerly. The hand that he extended dropped to his side, and he stopped short.

"I sent for you, Rajah, to tell you that I am leaving Shivapet to-night. I do not intend to return. After the treatment I have received I am convinced that you were right when you said that this was no place for me."

"I do not understand," he replied, in bewilderment. "Where have you hidden yourself during the last two days? They have been two years to us in our anxiety. Where have you been?" he demanded, with insistence.

"Is it possible that you don't know?"

"I swear to you that I am ignorant. Your mysterious disappearance has been too great a riddle for any of us to solve, and we have been dreading all sorts of evils. Tell me, please, where you have been hiding?"

Behind his question there was a terrible anxiety to know the worst, to have his mind set at rest, whatever the tale might be.

"In the palace."

"The palace!" he repeated under his breath, not with incredulity, but rather in despair.

"I was kidnapped and taken to that part of the palace known as the zenana. By whose orders it was done I am at a loss to understand."

She gazed at him as though she would wrest the truth from him, and know the worst. He read the suspicion that was in her mind.

"Is it possible that you suspect me of having had a

hand in such an infamous assault? Are you not my guest? By all the laws of hospitality could I do such a thing?"

His haggard eyes sought her face desperately for reassurance. She did not speak, but stood in doubt and perplexity.

"Delphine!" he cried, in deep distress. "Do you doubt me after what has passed between us? Such treatment would be impossible."

"I should like to believe it impossible," she said more softly, adding, with a touch of sadness that hurt him more than any expression of wrath could have done. "My faith of late has been shaken—in you, Rajah; for I never dreamed of seeing you at Karlimaya's feast;—and in myself." Her proud head drooped in self-accusation, and, for the first time, her eyes fell. "We were both wrong; we have both been mistaken."

He did not reply. The conviction that she only spoke the hard uncompromising truth, kept him silent. She continued—

"I have forgotten that you are no longer playing the part of an Englishman. I have forgotten that you have new obligations which must be fulfilled. Through me you have forgotten too, Rajah."

She lifted her head and gazed at him across the gulf, the impassable gulf lying between the orthodox Hindu and the loyal Christian, with eyes swimming in tears. The appeal went straight to his heart. In a moment he was close to her.

"It will be best for both of us if I leave Shivapet at once and never return. You must forget my existence," she said, as soon as she could trust herself to speak.

"No, no, no!" he cried. "If we have forgotten much during the last few weeks, we must be given the opportunity of making amends. You shall not be driven out

of Shivapore. It is only fair that I should mete out punishment where it is deserved, and show my people that my guests are to be honoured, not insulted." He spoke imperiously, and she liked him the better for it. "Who is it?"

As she did not reply immediately, he repeated his question.

"Who is responsible for this outrage. It is useless to try to keep it from me. Punishment will descend upon his or her head."

His eyes sparkled as he lifted his chin and set his mouth in the firm lines she knew of old. For all his heathenism he was a man after her own heart.

"You cannot punish. The chief mover of the outrage was the senior Ranee."

"I feared as much. All along I have dreaded this. May I hear the story of your adventures?"

She scrutinized his face, wondering if his self-control would carry him safely through, or whether the tale would rouse such a tempest of wrath as could not be allayed without the perpetration of violence that he would afterwards regret. The memory of his self-control on the unfortunate night of Karlimaya's festival reassured her. He did not lose his presence of mind on that occasion. She decided that he might be trusted.

"Rajah, look round this room. It reminds us of the Court. Let us imagine that we are back again, and that I have a story to tell that has nothing to do with you."

For answer he dropped into his favourite seat and glanced up at her with the shadow of a smile, submissive to her slightest wish.

"You mean that I am to keep my temper. All right, I will if I can."

"You must, if you are to hear all about this business. I want to tell you the story. The Dewan led me to the

carriage and said something to the coachman. I think he told him to drive fast. I cannot believe that he was in the secret. The coachman and syces had had their instructions, and were probably well paid for their share in the plot. After making several turnings, we pulled up before a large building. There were no lights, and I thought it had a strange appearance for a railway station. However, my experience of Indian railway stations does not go far, and I had not been to the Shivapet station since my arrival. I was hurried out of the carriage, and my luggage was deposited on the ground by the syces. The carriage drove off at once, and I was left alone with the ayah and my boxes. I understand that the coachman went to the station afterwards, to give colour to his story about my departure."

"It must have been so."

"Presently an old woman came, carrying a lantern. I asked her why the station was in darkness, and inquired for a porter. She replied rather shortly that I had been brought to the wrong door. She asked me to follow her, and said she would show me the way. I understood, of course, that she would lead me to the platform where I should find a porter. My ticket, if you remember, was taken by Ted in the morning to save me trouble, and sent to the bungalow. Carrying our hand luggage intended for the railway carriage, the ayah and I followed her through a dark room divided by a curtain, down still darker passages and up stone stairs. The woman opened a door, through which we saw the welcome light of a lamp. I entered, the ayah following. The door was instantly closed, and I found myself trapped."

"No violence, I hope?"

"None. I have no complaint to make of ill-treatment. There was a table and chair in the room, and a cot with cushions and rugs to sleep upon. I found, on examining

my prison that I had the use of two rooms, one opening into the other, and both were lighted by windows high up in the walls. During the night, whilst we slept, the luggage was brought up and deposited in the other room. The next morning the ayah made tea from the tea-basket. At dawn the same old woman appeared with a loaf of bread and some milk, and inquired if we wanted anything else. To all my questions she presented a stolid indifference, and refused to answer. I threatened, and the ayah scolded. I even called for help at the top of my voice, but to no purpose. I tried the doors of both rooms, but they were locked outside and the old woman was locked in with us. I tried to watch her closely, intending to get out with her, but she eluded me. Some one was helping her, and she slipped away and turned the key on me before I could escape. There was nothing for it but to be patient. I was really grateful that they gave me my luggage, for I could read and amuse myself as long as daylight lasted."

The Rajah's eyes shone with a light that boded ill for Amabai, whose description he recognized; but, after all, he thought, she was but a tool. The real culprit was the senior Ranee, with whom he intended to reckon sooner or later.

"I wonder if you will ever forgive us," he said.

She looked at him, and, for the first time since she began her story, she smiled.

"I made up my mind, Rajah, that I would never forgive."

"That was when you suspected me of having a hand in it." She did not reply, and he continued, holding himself in check with difficulty. "Ah, well, I suppose it was but natural; for your faith in me was shaken."

"It is restored. Seeing you here, I read in your eyes that I wronged you."

"Tell me how you escaped."

"It was through Royama."

"Royama!" he repeated, in astonishment. "Was she in the conspiracy?"

"Not in the plot to trap me. At first she was as much puzzled as the rest of you appear to have been. Then two or three little incidents came back to her memory with a new meaning. One of the worshippers, a low caste man, saw me with the Dewan at the festival. He was the servant at the Residency for whom I pleaded when he was wrongfully accused of placing a scorpion on my dress. He happened to be passing the gateway of the palace as the carriage turned in. He knew the stables were not in that direction, and he suspected mischief. He could not be sure. He tried to tell Royama what was in his mind; but at the time of his attempt she had not heard of my disappearance. Another incident pointing to my hiding-place was Peter's behaviour. She took him to the zenana to amuse the Ranees. On the way there and also coming back, he sat up and begged outside the door of the room that opened into the very one in which I was imprisoned. I had taught him in the game of hide-and-seek to sit up and beg as soon as he had discovered my hiding-place."

"Didn't he bark?"

"No; if he had, it is possible I might have heard him, All day long I noticed faint muffled sounds—women moving about bare-footed—and took them to be caused by the servants in the performance of their duties. I wish I had known that Royama was so near. At that time she was not aware of my disappearance. The truth flashed on her suddenly afterwards, when she was thinking over all that she had learned from her father."

"I wonder that she did not tell me her suspicions," said the Rajah.

"In the first place, there was no time. The inspiration

came like an unexpected flash of lightning, and she acted upon it immediately, before her design could be suspected. If she had communicated with you the Ranee's spies might have removed me by the time you reached the palace. She acted without any delay, and went straight to the zenana. Her father accompanied her, and waited outside in his carriage. It was agreed between them that if Royama did not return within a certain time, he was to go to you and ask for your help. Then she faced the Ranees."

"I don't envy her," he remarked grimly.

"She admitted that it was rather a dreadful ordeal, and required all her courage. At first they denied knowledge of my movements; but Royama ignored the statement. When finally she pointed out that if anything serious happened to me, it would serve as a justifiable excuse for your dethronement and their exile—an event they seem to dread more than anything else—they became silent, and one of the Ranees began to cry, saying that I was quite safe. The senior Ranee was most difficult to manage."

"Yet she has more common sense and natural shrewdness than all the rest," he said.

"Her common sense came to the rescue. She saw how impossible it was to keep me imprisoned; and at the same time she recognized that violence would be of no use. She gave a very unwilling order to the old dragon to unlock the door and set me free. It was that old dragon who personated my ayah and sent the message to Ted in my name."

"You have something more to tell me," he said quickly, as she paused, her eyes resting on him in doubt.

"If you can hear it without dealing death and destruction all round. These foolish women are your father's widows. Out of respect for his name they must be respectfully treated."

"I can't let this matter pass unnoticed; but I think I can make my displeasure felt without violence."

"Rajah, I know now where the scorpions came from," said Delphine, gravely. "The lamp that the old woman left with us that first night burned for one hour only. Fortunately I had candles and night-lights in the tiffin basket. In the silence of the night, when I was doing my best to sleep, we heard a faint scratching noise. The ayah seemed to know what it was. A hunt in the second room disclosed a basket full of scorpions—loathsome creatures of all sizes, from the big black to the small red kind. The woman who took us to the room and locked us in must have removed the lid of the basket just before she left. Two or three had climbed out, and were running along the matted floor. Fortunately for me, the ayah knew how to handle them and how to crush them. It was a horrid business, and I had to leave it to her. We could not be sure that we had found all, and it gave me a very uncomfortable feeling to think that one or two might still be crawling about the floor. If I had not had those nightlights, we should have been in black darkness all night long, and who knows what might have happened?"

"I am afraid there would have been an accident," he said, in a low, tense voice.

"In the morning the ayah made tea for me, as I have told you, from the tea-basket, and I had the breakfast that I intended to eat in the train. No one came near us all that day. A large pot of water had been provided, and, as I have mentioned, the woman brought us some milk and bread at sunrise. I read and amused myself as best I could; but, oh! the dullness and the length of that day! I thought it would never come to an end. If the ayah had not been with me I should have been frightened; but she assured me over and over again that I should be released. The second night passed, and again we made

tea and breakfasted. My food was running short, but there was enough to last through a third day, if I was careful—I had to feed the ayah as well as myself; but all my supplies would come to an end in two or three days—tea, tinned milk, methylated spirit, and the bread-and-butter. I can't tell you how glad I was when, about two o'clock to-day, the door opened and Peter, dear little Peter, the dog you gave me—ran in and greeted me. Royama came close behind. She flew into my arms, laughing and crying at the same time, and behind her stood a tall, proud woman in plain white, with grey hair."

"The senior Ranee!"

"So I gathered. It was by her order I was shut up. Why did she treat me in this way, Rajah?"

Her eyes sought his. He answered, with a touch of sadness.

"She was afraid of your influence over me."

"I understand. She need fear me no longer."

There was silence, and Delphine continued, in a low voice—

"Narayan! I must go. She was right. My influence has not been good. When I thought I was strengthening you, I was only perverting you. I had plenty of time to think it all out during that long, long day in the palace. It is best for me to pass out of your life. I can bring you no happiness."

"No, no!" he protested. "That will be running away from difficulty instead of facing it. Neither you nor I are made of the stuff that runs away. Stay with me. Help me through my trouble—not in the way I was once mad enough to hope for. Go to Calcutta and join Ted; but come back. Let me see you again, Delphine. Oh, Light of my heart! the fool cries for the star above him! I know the cry is useless; but for all that, the

star need not withdraw her light. Come back, my Queen! and I promise that you shall find me in my right mind—which I am not now! You will come back, Delphine!"

"I promise, Narayan. I will come back."

CHAPTER XXXIII.

It was the day of the durbar. The Rajah was to hold his Court and appear—not as the ark of his god nor as the pujari of his protective demon—but as the ruler of the State of Shivapore. The hall was once more brilliantly lighted and thronged with a happy pleasure-seeking crowd. The scene eclipsed in display the former, if it were possible. The robes worn by the nobles were of a more gorgeous character, and the jewels more abundant. The guard in new uniforms stood at the entrance with lances and pennons.

The dais, resplendent in scarlet and gold, held the Europeans, the Dewan, and a few favoured native gentlemen. Gopaula and his daughter were not among the number. Delphine entered the hall with her brother, and was greeted warmly by her friends. She had returned with Ted to Shivapet that very morning. The tale of the kidnapping was known. In deference to the feelings of the Rajah, little was said of it in public; but the private gossip was inevitable, and curiosity had to be satisfied.

"Glad to see you back. When did you come?" said Mrs. Constable, with a warm shake of the hand.

Her observant eye noted that Delphine was a trifle graver than her wont, and that her face clouded over with a new abstraction now and then, causing a downward droop of the lips hitherto rarely without a smile.

"This morning by the mail," was the reply.

"Not afraid to appear in Shivapet again?" asked Wythall, with a laugh. "We'll take care of you this time, you may be sure."

"Weren't you frightened at being shut up?" asked his wife, with some curiosity.

"Not exactly. My first feeling was one of anger. I was in a real rage to think how easily I had walked into the trap," replied Delphine.

She wore a dress of white and gold, with gold in her hair.

"I don't think any harm was intended," said Wythall. "All the Ranees desired was to give you a good fright."

"They succeeded in doing that. Do you know what the ayah found in the room? A basket full of scorpions! The woman who locked me in removed the lid just before she went out."

There was an exclamation from her hearers, and Wythall remarked that he was not aware their viciousness had taken so definite a form.

"There are other scorpions in the palace besides those you saw in the basket, apparently," said Mrs. Wythall. "Those old Ranees really ought to have a lesson."

"They've had one," remarked Dr. Constable, grimly.

"What shape did it take?" asked Delphine, not without anxiety lest the Rajah had been too harsh with them.

"After your final departure for Calcutta," said the Doctor, "And the Rajah, poor chap! was assured that you were safely off——"

"He came to the station attended by his bodyguard, and saw me into the train himself," said Delphine. "Could he have done more?"

"He was terribly upset by the affair," continued Dr. Constable. "As soon as you were gone he sent for me and explained his scheme of retribution, asking me if I agreed to it as health officer of the palace. I assured

him that it was absolutely the best thing he could do from every point of view."

"What was it? Do tell us, Dr. Constable?"

"The next day there was a tremendous storm. The Ranees were ordered to turn out of their rooms and they were sent to an out-of-the-way old palace sixty miles from Shivapet. The journey was done in bullock-carts, curtained and venetianed as in the old days when purdanasheen women used to travel. Night and day they journeyed, doing ten miles in the twenty-four hours. Each Ranee had her own coach, and was followed by a string of carts carrying her women and their belongings. You never saw such an exodus! In Dersingham's absence I had to help the Rajah with the arrangements. The thorn in our flesh was the senior Ranee. Do you think she would budge? Not a bit of it. I was beginning to fear that she would beat us; but the Rajah was one too many for her."

"How did he manage it?"

"He ordered in a lot of workmen with ladders and scaffolding and whitewash. The old Ranee took fright, and with a very bad grace and a good deal of abuse, departed. I fancy the Rajah has got the whip-hand of her at last."

"And a good thing too, if he is to have any peace in the palace," said Mrs. Constable.

"Good man!" commented Wythall.

"They really deserved to be punished in some way," said Delphine, who bore no malice now that she was safely back at the bungalow.

"They objected to the bullock carts," continued Dr. Constable. "And demanded the new motor. The Rajah wouldn't hear of it. He declared that it would be no punishment if they travelled that way; besides, they would all have been back the next day and we wanted ten clear days to carry out our plans. He put his foot down firmly, I can

tell you. It was to be bullocks and nothing else—slow country-cart cattle moving at a little less than two miles an hour, and absolutely incapable of going out of a walk. There was such wailing and weeping as you never heard as the Ranees, closely veiled, came down one by one with their followers and were packed into carts. They departed in the order of precedence, the senior Ranee going first."

"How pleased you must have been to see the last of them," said Delphine. "It gave you a welcome holiday."

Dr. Constable smiled. His wife went further; she laughed as she said—

"It's a fine holiday he has had! Every afternoon he has motored out after them at the Rajah's request, to inquire into their health and to see that everything was being done for their comfort."

"I was quite reconciled to the trouble," said Dr. Constable. "No sooner did we get rid of them than the zenana rooms were thoroughly turned out with the finest spring cleaning they have ever seen. There has been such a whitewashing inside and out; rematting, recarpeting, with no end of improvements, especially in the rooms occupied by the senior Ranee. Other rooms never used before have been cleaned and made habitable. The Ranees ought to be very pleased with them."

"They won't see them if they are in banishment," said Mrs. Wythall.

"They all came back this morning by the bullock carts in the same order as they went. They have been six days going, two days at the summer palace to rest, and six days coming back. It is to be hoped that they are sufficiently chastened and will not be up to any tricks again for some time to come. It was the Rajah's own thought to punish them by a fortnight's steady travel on an uninteresting road not in the best condition. They have had sunshine

and rain, cold and heat, dust and mud; but they are none the worse in health; in fact, I think they are all the better for the fresh air they have had. Well, Dersingham! Got back to your secretarial duties again, I suppose," he concluded, turning to Ted, who had been talking to the Dewan.

"Slipped into harness at once," replied the secretary. "I hadn't been in the bungalow ten minutes when I was wanted in the purdah room. The Ranees had just returned from their punishment excursion, and they were furious at the changes made by the Rajah. The rooms occupied by the senior Ranee were locked and all her properties turned out into the suite belonging to the second Ranee. There had been a move all down the line. The only one who appeared to be at all satisfied with the new arrangement was the fourth Ranee, to whom had been assigned the new rooms. She said that it was as good as going to a new house."

"What did you do to bring peace?"

"Assured them that I was powerless to make any alteration; that it had been done by the Rajah's orders while I was away. Thereupon they clamoured to see him and I had to say that he was busy with the Resident. The mention of your name, Mr. Harlesden," continued Ted, turning to the Resident, who had just arrived, "gave a new direction to their wrath. They have come to the conclusion that the Rajah has been acting under your advice. They are going to ask him to have you blown from a gun, I believe."

"How did you settle the racket?"

"The Rajah had foreseen that there would be trouble, and he was prepared. He wrote and told me what he was doing and the reason for it, which he will announce by and bye. I was to warn them that if they did not occupy the rooms that he had assigned to them by midday, every door was to be locked and they were to be deported again,

never to return. The carts had been detained in the palace courtyard and were waiting in readiness. The news produced a profound impression. One or two of them began to cry, judging by the sounds I heard behind the curtain. It didn't take long for the senior Ranee to come to a decision. The whole lot trooped back in a hurry to take possession. So ended the trouble."

"And there they are in the women's gallery watching us as usual behind the curtains," said Dr. Constable. "To-morrow their gang of spies will be at work reporting news that must be startling if it isn't accurate. Here comes the Rajah."

The ruler of Shivapore wore a uniform of blue, resplendent with gold and steel. On his head was a dark blue turban banded with rich gold embroidery and ornamented by a jewel from which sprang the royal aigrette. He looked every inch a man as he passed slowly up the length of the hall to the strains of martial music supplied by the band of the Bodyguard. This time his glance turned from right to left with quick recognition of his nobles and friends. Once more his eye was drawn towards Delphine. As she caught it she made a court curtsey and smiled. He acknowledged the salutation with an answering curve of the lips in which was no offence to any one.

He took his seat on the throne and when the music came to an end the Resident presented the English guests; and afterwards the nobles and native gentlemen were presented in turn by the Dewan.

At the end of the ceremony the Rajah rose and moved forward, facing the body of the hall. It was evident that he had something to say. The buzz of conversation died down, and all ears were strained to catch his words. He spoke in his own tongue understood by most of the English present.

"Gentlemen, my caste has been restored; the shraddah

ceremonies have been performed; and I hope I have shown sufficiently that I am in sympathy with my people by the part I played at the last durbar and again at the temple festival. I have one more duty to perform."

He paused, and the silence was intense. Every man held his breath in expectation. With the exception of the secretary and his sister, no one knew what was coming.

"My last duty is to marry. I claim the privilege of choosing a bride for myself. My choice is made. I have asked Gopaula Bahadur for his daughter, and he has consented."

Again there was a slight pause, and he continued. "I am taking this opportunity of introducing my future bride to you."

The Rajah turned his head for a brief moment and looked at Delphine, who responded with a brave smile. Unknown to him it covered a sore heart. Romance for her was dead. She had lost her lover.

Up the hall walked Gopaula, leading his daughter by the hand. She was clothed in white satin, and wore pearls and diamonds worthy of the royal state awaiting her. With a dignity that lost nothing by the new shyness which caused the brave eyes to be lowered, she advanced towards the dais. The Rajah descended the steps and her hand was placed in his. He took her to the seat next the throne and they sat down side by side.

Then for the first time she ventured to raise her eyes. It was easy to read there the happiness that had come to the daughter of Gopaula Bahadur. Surely in the warmth of that great love Narayan might find at least a partial realization of the dream that bid fair at one time to turn his brain.

* * * * *

The wedding ceremonies—they were not a few—began at once, but Delphine did not stay for them. The invitation

procured for her by Mrs. Constable was accepted gratefully, and she returned to Calcutta promising to pay Shivapet one more visit before sailing for England.

"I am sorry to have to leave, Ted," she said. "I hoped to stay some time with you; but after what happened in the palace I am sure it is best for me to go."

"Very much so," he replied cheerfully. "Don't worry yourself about me. I shall be all right."

"I'm afraid you will be rather lonely, and those Ranees are such a thorn in your flesh."

"I shan't have to worry about them now. The new Ranee Royama will settle their affairs for them. She can manage the lot single-handed, and she will have the Rajah behind her if she wants any help."

"Do you think you can keep house for yourself?" asked Delphine, presently.

"Don't think I shall try," he replied, a little awkwardly.

"What are you going to do then?"

"Follow the Rajah's example and marry."

"Who?" cried Delphine, astounded.

"You see it's like this, old girl. Before I left England I sounded Carrie on the subject. We couldn't make it an engagement because I didn't know in the least what I was going to do. As soon as I found it was a decent life and the quarters were fit, I wrote to Carrie. You see you could leave at any minute if things hadn't been comfortable; but if once we were married Carrie couldn't. She's coming out before you sail, and we shall be married in Calcutta."

"Oh! Ted! I am so glad!"

All the same, as Delphine travelled back to Calcutta to pay her visit she was conscious of a strange loneliness.

Some one else was not altogether free from the same depression. Harlesden's eyes had told him much and his hopes were at a low ebb. The future held many clouds. Sometimes he fancied that they might have a silver lining

for him in the far distance. At other moments he tried to resign himself to an indefinite bachelorhood; for if it was not Delphine, it should be nobody else. Of that he was convinced.

A man of less determination might have given up hope, but he was not that kind.

When the exodus took place in the hot season to Simla, Harlesden's thoughts turned to privilege leave and a run home.

We have the word of a well-known writer that people who have been in India are liable to hear the East a-calling.

If Delphine chanced to hear it, it should not be his fault if he did not profit by it.

THE END

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